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BART.

THE STORY
OF HIS LIFE

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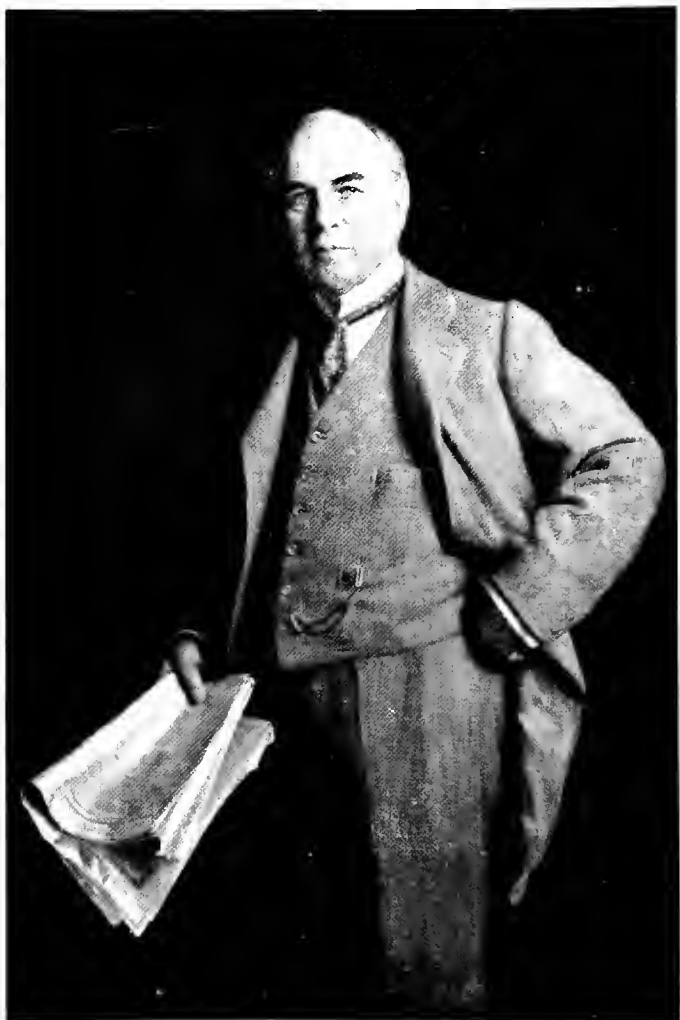
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THE LIFE-STORY
OF
SIR ROBERT W. PERKS
BARONET

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

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SIR ROBERT W. PERKS, BART., M.P.

(From the Painting by Mr. Arthur T. Nowell.)

[Frontispiece.]

THE LIFE-STORY
OF
SIR ROBERT W. PERKS
BARONET

BY
DENIS CRANE

WITH SEVEN ILLUSTRATIONS

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PREFATORY NOTE

THIS book could hardly have been written but for the generous assistance of many of Sir Robert Perks's friends, who, upon learning what was afoot, gladly opened their treasure-houses and brought forth things new and old. The author would have been proud to name those who have thus lightened his nevertheless arduous task, but that their number forbids it ; and where all have been equally obliging it would have been invidious to mention some and omit others. He therefore trusts that friends who have laid him under so great an obligation will be content with this assurance of his gratitude, and with their copy of a book which their own kindness has in no small degree helped to produce.

D. C.

September 1909.

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THE LIFE-STORY OF SIR R. W. PERKS

CHAPTER I

PARENTAGE

WHATEVER may be the inevitable defects of a biography written during the lifetime of its subject—and of the reality of those defects the author of this volume is fully conscious—such a work may possess certain intrinsic merits, which excuse, if they do not justify, its existence.

Only two of these need here be mentioned. One is that, by indicating the good qualities and achievements of its hero, it may encourage their emulation ; all the more so because—as against the old sneer that the good men all lived in the past—these qualities and achievements are daily verifiable.

The other is that, if the story be written with discrimination, it may win for its subject

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a measure of that honour which is only too frequently withheld until a man is dead and cannot enjoy it. This may be so even where one dissents from the hero's religious or political views, if it be admitted that what gives real distinction to a career is the moral courage it exhibits and the loftiness of its controlling purposes, rather than its approximation to any one particular interpretation of life.

In writing the present monograph, the author has endeavoured to invest his work with these two merits. Anything like a critical account of Sir Robert Perks's career, even if it were called for, would at present be impossible. This, however, may be claimed; from the first he has shone as a conspicuous example of a courageous Christian layman fighting side by side with the ministers of his day in many honourable causes; he has carried the fight, with singular determination and consistency, into the legislative councils of his country; he has been closely associated with industrial and commercial enterprises so gigantic and generally so successful that his experience must afford invaluable lessons to those who are as yet but on the threshold of

life ; and, what is more rare, amid all the cares arising out of these great enterprises, and throughout his steady rise in the social scale, he has retained his loyalty not only to the Church of his youth, but also to those of her doctrines and those more democratic features of her constitution which in the prosperous are so often a cause of stumbling or offence. It is natural, therefore, that his friends should wish to acquaint themselves more fully with the details of his career.

It was on April 24, 1849, in a Wesleyan minister's house at Hammersmith, that Robert William Perks was born ; but we must go a good deal farther back than that rightly to understand him. Indeed, the inclusion in our retrospect of a hundred additional years will hardly suffice ; for he is more closely and honourably bound to his antecedents than are most men. For this reason the somewhat threadbare phrase, ' A son of the manse,' is in his case quite inadequate. The personal forces of his ancestry, rather than the incidental atmosphere of a Methodist preacher's home, were the dominant influences in the formation of his character.

His father, George Thomas Perks, came

from Madeley, in Shropshire, where the family had been resident for several generations. Madeley, as every student of the religious life of this country knows, was the parish of John Fletcher, whose name is inseparably associated with the town. The population in Fletcher's time was under five thousand, and can hardly have been much more in 1819, when George was born. Mrs. Fletcher, whose 'saintliness' equalled that of her husband, had died only four years before, and among those who visited her on her deathbed was George's mother. It is recorded, indeed, that the dying woman prayed that upon her 'the choicest blessings might descend.'

The Perks's house stood opposite the parish church. It was a substantial, double-fronted edifice, with high dormer windows, and, on account of its early associations with the Fletchers, could perhaps lay claim to a certain degree of sanctity. Under its hospitable roof the godly vicar must often have tarried to discuss parish affairs, for George's grandfather (by whom he was brought up, his father having died in early middle life) was one of the churchwardens. Moreover, for some considerable time one of the rooms was utilized for the

Methodist society class, of which, after Fletcher's death, George's grandfather, who lived to a patriarchal age, assumed the leadership. He was a friend of John Wesley, whom he met at the Madeley vicarage.

The connexion between the house and the vicarage seems to have been a friendly one even in later days, for through the persuasions of Mr. Eyton, a subsequent vicar, George was in his youth destined for the ministry of the Established Church. God willed otherwise, however, and soon after the lad's conversion he experienced a call to exercise his undoubted gifts among the Methodists. From that day until his death his career was honourable and distinguished. He attained to the highest positions his Church had to bestow. In 1872 he filled the office of Secretary of the Conference, and in the following year was elected President. His competitors on the latter occasion were all men greatly beloved, and their names still rank high in Methodist annals—Alexander M'Aulay, Morley Punshon, Gervase Smith—yet so popular was his candidature, that of the three hundred and sixty-six votes cast, no less than three hundred and twenty were in his favour. He had already,

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as far back as 1867, been appointed Secretary of the Wesleyan Missionary Society, and to the onerous duties of that position he devoted the best years of his life. His work involved a visit to Africa, during which, it is alleged, he seriously overtaxed his strength by long journeys and arduous labours. A year or two later he passed away while advocating the cause in which he had already shown such self-effacement.

The more intimate friends of Sir Robert assert that, though there are certain points of difference between the two men, he has inherited in an unusual degree some of the best qualities of his father. Certainly any one comparing the portraits of father and son would observe a striking outward likeness; there is the same steadfast gaze, the same broad, clear-cut, resolute mouth, and the same ample brow; and the resemblance extends also to the compact frame, firm step, and powerful voice. But the intellectual and moral likeness is not less complete. What Dr. Punshon, in *Wesley and His Successors*, claims for the father may, with few reservations, be claimed for the son. 'He had superior natural endowments, which were developed and ma-

tured by conscientious study ;' in early life 'his character had a singular ripeness which forbade men to despise his youth,' while in later years it proved to be unusually 'well-balanced,' and 'displayed in harmonious combination qualities not often found together.' And the same may be said in respect to the 'weight, promptitude, power and independence' attributed to the father, 'in no common measure,' at the time of his election to the Presidency.

In one notable point, however, the likeness breaks down. At a congratulatory dinner in the precincts of the House of Commons a short time ago, Sir Robert, in alluding to his father, described him as 'a confirmed but reticent politician.' Equally 'confirmed,' but necessarily far less 'reticent,' the son has pursued a militant path ; whereas, in politics, at least, the father's course was one of tranquillity and peace. In his first address from the President's chair the latter said : 'As Methodist preachers we cannot afford to be politicians. Our people are divided, and we cannot please one party without offending the other. Besides, three years is much too contracted a period to allow of any abstraction

of time or energy from our great and glorious spiritual work, which is to save souls.' Heartily in accord with these sentiments, with reference to the ministry, as Sir Robert is, it is his own exemption from such restraints, as a layman and a professional politician, which accounts for the major differences between his father and himself. Beneath the somewhat brusque and lawyer-like exterior, and behind the strong and often mordant speech, there is, as it is hoped this story will show, more of the delicate sensibility and tenderness of heart which characterized his father than careless observers would suppose.

For some twenty years or more Sir Robert's father was one of a little group of Wesleyan ministers who became famous, as much for their advanced sympathies in matters classical and political, as for their scholarship and evangelical fervour. Among other enterprises, they founded the *Methodist Recorder* (then a Liberal journal), which has since become the semi-official organ of their Church. The names of these distinguished men were Dr. Punshon, Dr. Gervase Smith, Dr. Ebenezer Jenkins, Luke Wiseman, Charles Garrett, and William Arthur. They have since passed away, but

in the son of at least one member of the group the old Liberal spirit still survives.

Mr. George Perks commenced his ministry at Leeds, acting for the time being as President's Assistant. When he left Leeds in 1843 he was presented with a magnificent folio polyglot Bible (now in Sir Robert's library) in eight languages, and signed, 'John Bowers, William Kelk, Francis A. West, Ministers; and William Smith and Thomas Bell, Circuit Stewards.' His first circuit was Dalkeith, where there was a small Wesleyan colony. While stationed here he attended Edinburgh University and was a student under Sir William Hamilton. He also attended the lectures of Hugh Miller, the famous geologist. The love of systematic theology, which subsequently won him honour among his ministerial brethren, was manifest even in these early days. His lodgings in Dalkeith chanced to be close to the palace of the Duke of Buccleuch. The duke had a steward, connected with the Methodist society, with whom he not infrequently got into dispute upon the subject of predestination and other abstruse theological problems, and the young circuit minister was more than once sent for

by the duke to settle, as a sort of theological arbitrator, the controversy upon these thorny themes. It is related that the duke's admiration of the young divine led him more than once to attend the Methodist chapel.

It was while preaching in Edinburgh, during his residence at Dalkeith, that George Perks made the acquaintance, at the house of Miss Drummond (afterwards Lady Falshaw), of the lady whom he subsequently married. Her father, Alexander Dodds, was a rising architect, who, having lost his wife, left his native town of Haddington and came with his two daughters to the Scottish capital. Here he laid the foundations of a modest fortune ; for at the conclusion of the French wars Edinburgh, like many other cities, entered upon a period of marvellous prosperity, during which the stately squares and streets of the western portion of the city were laid out.

Unfortunately, the promising career of Alexander Dodds was early cut short, and his death was followed by that of one of his daughters. Consequently Miss Dodds, when George Perks met her, was an orphan, but she was happily the owner of several large houses

in Moray Place, then, as now, one of the fashionable quarters of Edinburgh. These furnished her with a fair competency at that time and during the lean years of her husband's ministry.

'My mother,' says Sir Robert, 'was a woman of very extensive information and a diligent reader, but she had very little humour. She was a Scotchwoman and a Presbyterian to her finger-tips, and dated everything from the Disruption.' Like many more of her countrywomen, she was a strange combination of strong common-sense and superstition, and was to the end of her days a firm believer in second-sight. Among her accomplishments were music and painting, at both of which she was decidedly clever. She was a loyal Methodist minister's wife, devoting most of her time to her home and her family. When her husband visited Africa she accompanied him. After his death she settled at Beckenham, where, many years later, she herself entered into rest.

Their first circuit after their marriage was Perth, the stipend being the almost incredibly small sum of thirty pounds a year. And the manse, which adjoined the back of the chapel,

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was as poor as the salary. To add to its scanty accommodation, the chapel gallery—never needed by the meagre congregations that then assembled—had been partitioned off and added to it. It was approached by what one who heard the story of her home-coming from the bride's own lips, called 'an old outside staircase'; and the same person expatiated with natural feeling upon the extraordinary conditions which enabled the Perth church to secure the incalculable influence of George Perks's character and service, in exchange for this humble abode and thirty pounds a year.

Under their new leader, however, the congregations grew; for his sermons, closely reasoned, full of sound practical teaching, and untrammelled by notes, suited the people. But they were not to retain him long. In 1846 came the inevitable call to London, where, three years later, as already stated, the subject of this book was born.

It is not, however, to this first London home that Sir Robert's earliest recollections go back, but to Manchester, where his father travelled six years. Writing in the *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* some time ago, he said:

'My earliest recollection of a Methodist

chapel was being carried by my father up to the gallery windows of the Oldham Street Chapel, Manchester, to see Queen Victoria and the Duke of Wellington go past. John Wesley did not attach much importance to the consecration of churches and graveyards. Indeed, he called it a Pagan ceremony. My father, I fancy, had no high classical notions of the sanctity of religious buildings; for I well remember him frequently playing hide-and-seek with my sisters and me in Higher Broughton Chapel, which was then a very wealthy suburban church standing in fields.' The circuit steward was a rough old contractor, named Garstang, who was fond of the preacher's lad and often asked him to the Hall. One day the boy was lost. At last he was discovered inside the kennel of a huge mastiff, where he had spent the whole afternoon.

Even in these early days it was the father's custom to take his son with him to his evening appointments, a practice which he maintained all through his ministry. Riding on Sunday was not permitted, and on the long walks it was a strict rule never to talk on their way to chapel; but they made up for their silence on the way home.

‘ I remember staying one night to the love-feast at Irwell Street Chapel,’ said Sir Robert, speaking some years ago at Manchester. ‘ Among the men who spoke that night was an old coal-heaver on the Bridgewater Canal. I can still see him as he rose in the front of the gallery. Walking home I noticed a falling star shoot across the sky, and turning to my father I asked him if it was true that, as folk said, some one had that moment died.

‘ “ No, my boy,” he said, “ but if old William, the coal-heaver, were to die to-night there would be another star in heaven.” ’

Another incident which stamped itself upon the boy’s memory was connected with one of the less pleasant experiences that fall to the Methodist preacher’s lot. This was a tedious journey during a change of circuits from Manchester to Bath, whither the family removed in 1856. The long trek was broken at Wolverhampton, where the father’s relatives lived. The arrival at Bath was far from cheerful. No one expected them, and the minister’s house, then a forbidding building standing in the chapel yard, was shut up.

Three happy years, however, were spent in the fine old city, and Sir Robert cherishes some

pleasant reminiscences of his home-life there. An incident occurred during this period which throws an interesting light on George Perks's tolerance and catholicity. He was a somewhat enthusiastic student of Irish ecclesiastical history, and especially of the life of St. Patrick. He had a strong opinion that modern Romanism was totally at variance with the teaching and practice of St. Patrick, and in a lecture at the Guildhall he had so vigorously asserted these opinions as to call forth in the local paper the severe condemnation of the chief Catholic priest. Walking with Robert one day in Prior's Park, Mr. Perks came suddenly *vis-à-vis* with his Catholic critic, stopped, shook hands with him, and entered into cordial conversation. When the priest had gone, the following dialogue took place between father and son :

‘ Father, was not that man a Catholic priest ? ’

‘ Yes, my lad.’

‘ But is not that the man who attacks you in the paper ? ’

‘ Yes, my boy.’

‘ Then I should think you will never want to meet him again.’

‘I dare say we shall never meet again till we meet in heaven.’

The idea of a Roman Catholic priest getting to heaven, confesses Sir Robert, was quite new to him ; but this was his father’s way of training his children. He declares he never knew him to sit down and talk deliberately to them about their religious life. Instead, they were taught to think and act for themselves. This did not mean that his parents gave little direct guidance to their children’s convictions ; on the contrary, Sir Robert says : ‘I think I owe my love of freedom in Church and State to my father ; my strong aversion to sacerdotalism to my mother.’ And their influence in other phases of thought and feeling will be not less marked in the course of this sketch.

A notable result of this method of parental training was the way in which the high traditions of Methodism became inextricably entwined with the boy’s whole life. It would be as hard for Sir Robert to-day to cut himself adrift from his shadow as from the Church of his youth. Speaking thirty years ago of the problem of attaching children to the Church of their fathers, he said that, though

not himself an indiscriminating believer in the revival of ancient traditions to achieve that purpose, his own experience would tell a tale. Fourteen or fifteen years before, he declared, his father had led him into Wesley's Chapel, taken him round to the Communion table at the back, and pointed out to him the tablet to the memory of John Wesley, and then to the monument of John Fletcher ; and afterwards told him how his own grandfather had taken the latter's place at the class-room at Madeley, and looked after the early Methodists. The influence of such episodes as that, he concluded, added to the faithful life and triumphant death of his father, had so impressed him that for his own part he could never forsake the Methodist Church.

More recently, at the Bristol Conference, he related how when he first came to that city, forty years before, his father took him for a tour of its streets and, between his observations on the sights they saw, told him of the illustrious men who fought in bygone days the glorious battles of Nonconformity—of Penn and Fox, of Wesley and Whitefield, of Robert Hall and John Foster, and of that

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giant of power and resolution who towered above them all, Oliver Cromwell. The little poetry, romance, and imagination he possessed, he said, were to be attributed to that and to similar talks with his father in Bristol and other cities.

But his strongest Methodist associations seem to have been formed at City Road, whither his father removed in 1864. 'In those days,' he says, in the magazine already quoted, 'the preachers at Wesley's Chapel lived on either side of the chapel. This was one of the secrets of their power. Wesley House, now a small museum, was my father's house. My little bedroom was John Wesley's old "praying-room." My mother and I used to read Wesley's Life, and in fancy we peopled the house once again with the friends of the great evangelist. Across the way was the sacred burial-place of the Puritans, where rest the bones of John Bunyan and Daniel Defoe.

'It was from the windows of Wesley's House that we saw Garibaldi enter London in triumph after the Liberation of Italy. My father and I made a huge Italian flag, which we hung at the gate, with Wesley's name below, and we were abundantly rewarded

when the Italian patriot rose in his carriage and took off his grey slouched hat, and saluted Wesley's name and the flag of his enfranchised country. A few years later it fell to my father's lot, aided by two generous Lancashire laymen, to start the Wesleyan Mission in the Eternal City.'

These were some of the formative influences of the boy's home-life on its distinctively religious side. For the rest, the discipline was somewhat Spartan-like, as befitted the household of a Methodist preacher. Yet was it tempered by a serene happiness, which, notwithstanding the daily discussion of matters of public interest, neither controversy nor the faintest approach to a difference ever interrupted or disturbed.

CHAPTER II

SCHOOLDAYS

OF the many decisions which parents have to make concerning their sons, none is more momentous than the selection of a tutor or the choice of a school. Character and destiny here both hang in the balance. Considerations of health, of temperament, and of vocation have to be carefully weighed, for a blunder often means for the victim, not only present torture, but also future incapacity and all the difference between failure and success.

On this point young Perks's parents appear to have been wisely guided. They showed the same care in the education of their children as they did in their religious training. In Robert's case public and private schools nicely divided their favour. When the family settled at Bath, he was at first sent to a seminary kept by a

Mr. Shaw, who subsequently transferred his establishment, with gratifying success, to a London suburb. But close at hand was the New Kingswood School, the successor of the 'Old' Kingswood founded near Bristol by John Wesley in 1746; and it was with a view to entering his son as a scholar there, and in order that he might be near him during his first terms, that Mr. Perks had accepted the call to the Bath Circuit. To New Kingswood, then, in 1858, Robert duly went.

The fascinating history of this remarkable foundation has been well told by 'Three Old Boys' in a comprehensive volume published a few years ago. Widely as life at the new school differed from that at the old, it was nevertheless, even so late as young Perks's time, sufficiently rigorous. Boys of the period have given varying accounts of the establishment. One speaks of it as 'a rough, cruel place,' where the 'punishments were brutal'; another says 'the tone was good, healthy, and fair'; and a third, that there was 'little immorality, bullying, or unfairness,' yet 'the boys were cowed and spiritless.'

Probably the worst that could be said of it was that the religious atmosphere was none too

wholesome. There is said to have been 'too much spiritual analysis.' But this in Robert's case was a defect which parental training neutralized. Another mistake was that, although the situation of the school is one of exceptional beauty and full of historic interest, little use was made of the fact. The boys were unduly confined within the school precincts, and so came but little under the humanizing influence of the magnificent prospects by which they were surrounded.

Games were not so highly organized then as they are to-day. Cricket was played, though not under ideal conditions, and for a time young Perks was captain of his team. Football was allowed only in the asphalted playground, where special rules had to be made to meet the conditions ; moreover, it was usually prohibited in winter. Owing to the difficulties which beset these manlier games, minor pastimes, hardly less dear to the schoolboy's heart, such as fives, racquets, prisoner's base, I spy, marbles, tops, tallywags, and hopscotch, had all the greater vogue.

A word must be said about the dietary. For breakfast and tea this consisted solely of milk and dry bread. The milk, which was

warmed by the addition of hot water in very cold weather, was served in tin cans. Leaden spoons were also supplied, and tradition says that their handles were often much abbreviated, and that in many cases their bowls were punctured, the holes having to be plugged before the spoons could be of service. Happily, the supply of bread was practically unlimited; when a boy had devoured his plateful of 'wholes,' he might come again for 'halves,' and yet again for 'quarters.' For dinner, beef and mutton were served six days a week, being followed chiefly by rice and treacle. The rice and treacle were boiled together, and both courses were served on the same plate. (Treacle and mutton gravy, ugh!) On Saturday there was originally only one course—bread and cheese. This, however, was altered by the Rev. Theophilus Woolmer, who, under the conviction that abstinence from meat for forty-eight hours was not conducive to health, substituted hash. When his committee objected to the expense, he sacrificed the whole of his meagre salary of a hundred pounds a year to maintain the change.

The abolition of the bread-and-cheese diet

did away with a famous delicacy of the boys' own manufacture, known as 'cheese-cakes.' The recipe is given by the authors of the *History of Kingswood*: 'Take one of the small bun-shaped loaves served out for Saturday's dinner, and out of the thick flat crust at the bottom carefully cut a piece about an inch square. Scoop out the crumbly interior and eat it at once. Cut up the cheese into small pieces, add salt and pepper. Stuff the hollowed loaf with the mixture, replace the square of crust, and tie all round with a bit of string. "Convey" the whole out of the hall, and, as soon as opportunity serves, put it in the hot ashes in one of the stoves, and there leave it for half an hour, or longer in case of any danger of discovery. After which, eat on the sly.'

Mr. Woolmer was followed in the governorship by the Rev. F. A. West, who, notwithstanding his many excellences, was extremely unpopular with the boys on account of his severity, which physical weakness and ill health undoubtedly aggravated. He held the office for seven years, the first five of which synchronized with the later years of Perks's term at the school. Twice during Mr. West's

governorship, once in 1863 and again in 1864-5, there was an outbreak of scarlet fever. On the former occasion there were twenty-four cases and four deaths; on the latter, one death. A not less serious epidemic of the same malady had occurred in 1860, when fifty boys, four masters, six servants, and all Mr. Woolmer's seven children, were stricken down. On neither occasion, however, was young Perks attacked.

Whatever modicum of truth there may be in Sir William Maule's famous dictum, that whereas private schools turn out 'poor creatures,' public schools make 'sad dogs,' it would not seem from the foregoing sketch that there was any great danger of the Kingswood boys sacrificing to passing pleasures and surreptitious dissipations the energies more justly claimed by their studies; while, on the other hand, those characteristics of public-school life which tend to sharpen the faculties for dealing with human affairs existed to the full. Robert's seven years at Kingswood were undoubtedly an excellent preparation for the career that lay before him, though it does not appear whether his parents had at the time any presentiment of what that career

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would be. 'Possibly the best thing that can be said of Kingswood in those days,' he stated some time ago, 'is that the preachers' sons were taught habits of endurance, fortitude, and self-reliance. We learned earlier than usual that life is a conflict, that friendships are fleeting, and that knowledge is not always power.'

As to his school record, he attacked his studies with the seriousness and determination characteristic of him, gaining distinction in mathematics, while acquitting himself well in all subjects. The official school orders from 1858 to midsummer 1860 are incomplete. It is therefore impossible to follow closely his position during that period; but in July 1860 he held the ninth place in Class IV., there being sixteen boys in the class and seven classes in the school. At midsummer in the following year he appears in Class III. Then, unfortunately, the orders once more break down, and there is no further record of his name until July 1864. By that date he had won his way to the sixth place in Class I., a position which he retained throughout his last year. Of the five classmates above him, four at least have attained to positions open only to men of high character and undoubted

ability. One was Richard Green Moulton, now Professor of Literary Theory and Interpretation at Chicago University; another was Thomas Frederick Lockyer, who graduated at London University and is to-day a distinguished Wesleyan minister; the third, George Joseph Morris, graduated at the Royal University of Ireland and at present occupies a responsible position in the Civil Service; while the fourth, Richard Waddy Moss, is well known as a Doctor of Divinity and a tutor in Systematic Theology at Didsbury College. Among the young student's contemporaries at one time or another were also Lord Justice Moulton, Dr. W. T. Davison, of Richmond College, the Rev. John Hornabrook, Secretary of the Wesleyan Conference, and George Perress Sanderson, the elephant-hunter.

How did Robert impress his schoolmates? Some, who were in higher or lower classes, can recall no details of their associations with him, and retain, as one of his more distinguished fellow students puts it, 'only a general recollection of an active, vivacious, energetic boy with considerable force of character.' Others, like Dr. Waddy Moss, Rev. T. F. Lockyer, B.A.,

and Mr. Morris, were more intimate, and have reminiscences of a more particular and interesting nature. Thus Mr. Lockyer says :

‘ Robert W. Perks was one of those with whom my associations were closer than with most in my school-days at Kingswood between forty and fifty years ago, and the comradeship thus begun was continued in the years that followed. He was one for whom, even in boyhood, I had not only a liking, but a great respect. His character, already well formed, was sturdy and strong, and his judgement shrewd even in matters that usually lie outside a schoolboy’s cognizance. Anything mean could never be suggested in connexion with his name ; indeed, there was a wholesome severity on his part, both of tone and of look, which effectually discouraged such behaviour in others. While not exactly a brilliant scholar, he yet worked with such dogged determination that he held his own with most of his compeers, and left within a very few places of the captaincy of the school. Several times since our paths began to diverge I have owed much to his practical sagacity in matters upon which I have asked his advice, and still follow his career with unabated interest.’

Mr. G. J. Morris recollects that, although the rules did not rigidly enforce the wearing of the school uniform, his classmate generally wore his 'sheepskin,' as the college coat was called, even when he was one of the seniors. He also speaks of his friend's 'caustic wit,' which was generally directed against objects justly regarded as reprehensible ; and declares, 'He would not spare a sham or a humbug.'

Dr. Waddy Moss was at Kingswood for several years contemporaneously with Sir Robert, and for five quarters in succession the two were next to one another in the quarterly classification. He says :

'Sir Robert was a very pleasant boy to sit next to—always kind and agreeable, and whilst a thorough boy, not given to cranks of an extreme type. During part of the time, his father was one of the resident ministers in Bath ; and thereby associations with Bath houses were created, which were maintained afterwards. To several of the boys this proved a great convenience at a time when no one was allowed outside the school premises, except in the procession to chapel or under the personal charge of a master. The licence granted Sir Robert admitted of the delivery of messages,

of dealings with a favourite shop in Guinea Lane, and occasionally of other surreptitious proceedings. There is a tradition of a visit to a racecourse, in which other boys took part ; but it is better to think of Sir Robert as the sole culprit.

‘ In those days the highest form was called the First Class. Sir Robert and myself were there : and his name was appended to several documents of which copies survive. One was a petition to the committee for the use of the field adjoining the desolate playground. It was a revolutionary proceeding, such as might have been expected from the character of the ringleaders, and it closed with the request that the reply of the committee might be communicated to the boys. They were unwilling to be treated with the disdain which had been shown the masters eight or ten months before.

‘ Sir Robert was not the poet of the school in those days—no one would suspect him of that. The poet was a boy who has for many years acquitted himself well in a southern rectory. But Sir Robert was the intermediary between the school and the city, and either he, or an older boy, now a minister of

some eminence, must be held responsible for the circulation of the lines beginning—

I'm a Kingswood boy, you see,
The height of aristocracy—

which first appeared on a doll dressed in the Kingswood costume of that day and exposed for sale at a bazaar in Bath.

'In play and in study Sir Robert gave a good account of himself. He excelled in mathematics rather than in classics, but could hold his own in any subject. He was at once popular amongst his contemporaries, and independent; and those who knew him best recall the memory of him with pleasure, and are proud of the good work he has done in the Church and State.'

Dr. Moss's reference to his friend's lack of the poetic sense—a defect probably inherited from his Scotch mother—finds amusing confirmation later on in this chapter, in connexion with Sir Robert's first visit to Paris. It also recalls a remark of Dr. Morley Punshon at the centenary celebrations of Wesley's Chapel. Sir Robert had preceded the famous orator, and had dropped some word or other which revealed his unpoetic strain, whereupon Dr.

Punshon took him gently to task and declared with exquisite pleasantry that where there ought to have been on his young friend's head the bump of reverence, there was a 'deep hole.'

The visit to the racecourse, notwithstanding the Doctor's suspicious disclaimer that 'it is better to think of Sir Robert as the sole culprit,' was certainly not made alone. Indeed, on a fairly recent occasion one of Sir Robert's fellow adventurers stood with him on a public platform. Borrowing the Doctor's phraseology, however, it is perhaps 'better to think' of the escapade as never having been wholly carried out, and as having been essayed rather in the spirit of a budding social reformer than in that of a would-be sportsman, seeing that a few years ago Sir Robert unequivocally declared: 'Never in my life have I been on a race-course, and I have never made a bet.'

On leaving Kingswood, in 1865, Sir Robert went to Eldon House, Clapham, a private school kept by Mr. Henry Jefferson, his old head master at Bath. Mr. Jefferson was a man of beautiful character, of strong moral sense, and a teacher of transcendent power. He specially regretted the rule under which

boys were compelled to quit Kingswood upon reaching the age of fifteen, and it was largely his failure to get this rule altered that led to his resignation. Upon opening his own school at Clapham, the sons of the Methodist laymen, attracted by his scholarship, thronged to his establishment ; but unfortunately its financial administration was not so sound as its curriculum, and in 1873 it was closed.

Sir Robert regards Mr. Jefferson as the most successful head master Kingswood ever had. Mathematics was his forte, and geology his hobby. Many a Saturday afternoon did Robert's back ache carrying home bags of stones in which the poor head master hoped to find fossils, and, like many another mining speculator, found nothing. In spite of his mathematics and geologizing, Mr. Jefferson was something of a poet and romancer ; a fact of which, some few years later, his old scholar had a curious illustration.

Sir Robert had earned a few guineas by an article in one of the reviews, and, the Franco-German War being just ended, he determined after a long balancing of ways and means to spend them on a first trip to Paris. Waiting at Rouen on his way from Dieppe, whom

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should he encounter on the platform but Henry Jefferson.

‘Perks,’ said he, ‘we have half an hour to spend here. Let us go to the Market Place and see the spot where Joan of Arc was burned—we have just time.’

So away they started, the little head master striding in front and his young friend following. Threading their way among the stalls they came at length to a spot in the centre, facing the Cathedral, where La Pucelle laid down her life for France. ‘Little Jeff,’ as the scholars used to call him, stepped on to the historic slab, lifted his hat, spent some moments in contemplation, turned his eyes heavenwards, and then, suddenly recollecting the time, cried to his companion as he moved from the spot—

‘Now, Perks, you have only a minute. Get on the stone.’

To please his old master and perhaps also from habit, Sir Robert did as he was told.

‘How do you feel?’ anxiously inquired his friend.

‘I feel, sir,’ he replied, ‘exactly the same as I did when I stood on that other stone.’

Mr. Jefferson heaved a sigh, and in a few

moments they were back at the station, both doubtless wondering at the other's strange bent of mind.

But, like most men of affairs, Sir Robert probably professes more indifference to the poetic side of life than he actually feels. At any rate, in those early days he was as susceptible to the romance and mystery of London as any other young man. When he left Eldon House he had no conception what he was going to be, and to himself seemed to have no special aptitude for anything. His father wished to send him to Cambridge, but for him this had indifferent attractions. Like a bit of plastic clay, therefore, ready for the potter, he roamed the magic streets of London, giving himself up to the feelings and historic memories they awakened. No great pageant passed through the city but he was there. He traversed the ancient and now-demolished squares. He took journeys up and down the river. His imagination was fired by the recitals of an old minister who, when a boy, had tramped to London to attend John Wesley's funeral, and who told how at that time there was not a single house between the 'Angel' at Islington and City Road Chapel, and how he well

remembered getting over a stile at the top of Lombard Street into some fields. A memorable experience on these London wanderings was the hanging of some pirates at the Old Bailey. Billingsgate Market, Covent Garden, and the old buildings now superseded by the Law Courts, with the fine civic mansions hard by, he knew well, as he did also that magnificent view of the city which is to be seen at dawn from the ball of St. Paul's. 'A great capital is a country in miniature,' said Macaulay; and these trampings on foot through all corners of the metropolis and at all hours—the sole means by which cities can be studied to good purpose—have often proved of service to Sir Robert in one phase or another of his public or commercial life.

It was his mother's desire to keep him at home, perhaps, more than his own lack of interest, which knocked the Cambridge project on the head. The urgent advice of an uncle, an Anglican dean and incumbent at Melbourne, who attributed his own ecclesiastical progress to his having been a student of King's College, London, was, that his nephew should be sent to that closely preserved Anglican school of learning; and as this counsel came less into

conflict with his mother's caution, or second-sight, or whatever it was, that made her wish to keep her boy in London, it readily found acceptance. Nor has Sir Robert ever had reason to regret it.

For three years he attended King's College, and never, his friends declare, did a youth work harder. He took most of the college prizes, one for divinity, one for mathematics, a third for modern languages, and sundry others. He also won the Dasent Prize given by the Editor of *The Times* for an essay on 'The Influence of the Reformation on the Gentlemen of England, as shown by Spenser in his *Faërie Queene*.' Another essay prize which fell to him was that founded by Sir James Stephen, the subject being 'Ancient and Modern Systems of Colonization Compared.' Altogether his career at King's College was a brilliant one. He matriculated at London University in honours, and gained honours in classics, English, and modern languages in his B.A. examination.

His tutors were nearly all Anglican clergy. Canon Lonsdale was his classics tutor, and he took the Canon's prize for a Latin essay. His tutors in theology were Canon Jelf, whom he

describes as 'a high and dry old Churchman, a staunch believer in Church and State'; and Dean Plumptre, 'a theologian of a far different stamp.' His tutors in mathematics and English history were also canons. But the man to whom he owed most was the famous Preacher of the Rolls and historian of Elizabethan times, Dr. Brewer, under whose guidance he wrote every week a short essay on current topics, some literary, some historical, and some political.

Notwithstanding the strong Anglican atmosphere of the College, and in spite of the fact that every morning for three years he had to listen to the Anglican liturgy, Sir Robert freely confesses that not a soul interfered with his religious views. 'I was, I think, the only Dissenter of my year,' he says, 'but I came through this fiery ordeal without, so far as I am aware, having the smell of clericalism or Anglicanism upon me.'

Whilst pursuing these studies he decided, much against his mother's wishes, and with the tacit consent of his father, to enter for the Indian Civil Service. Thrice he sat for the examination and thrice he failed. Each year the Government took fewer candidates.

Once he escaped by only three places, another time by ten. Thwarted thus by destiny, and yielding to the dissuasions of his father's friend, Sir Francis Lycett, he tried no more. Had he succeeded, what influence would he have exercised on the administration of our great dependency? Would his penetration, tenacity, and genius for finance have raised him to eminence, or would the East have swallowed him up, as it has so many other gifted men? Interesting as the speculation is, it cannot here be pursued. Circumstances decided that he had to stay at home, and what has to be is best.

Before leaving this chapter, the reader may like to know which of his studies Sir Robert found most useful to him in making his way in the world. In reply to a question of that purport he once said :

‘ I am speaking of forty years ago. Events have moved rapidly since. English life is not the same. Our cities are different. Commerce moves along new lines. Science has altered much. England is more of a cosmopolitan exchange and *entrepôt* for the world. Distances have been bridged. Men act more quickly and think less. Journalism does too

much of the thinking. Men are less reliant. Woman has invaded the domains of trade, and wields less power in the home. Money can do more than it could forty years ago. There is less respect for authority. People are so keen to be thought "broad-minded" and "liberal" that they will tolerate anything rather than be thought "fanatical" or "bigoted." All this has its reflex effect upon education. If you ask what branch of my study helped me most in my future work, I should say, first, mathematics and the kindred studies of physical science; next, the study of the literature and history of my own and other lands; and lastly, such acquaintance with modern languages as I was able, as a student, to acquire.'

CHAPTER III

A CHAPTER OF BEGINNINGS

CAMBRIDGE and the Civil Service having both been set aside as unsuitable or impracticable, the problem of the future once more obtruded itself. A reasonable inquiry, particularly from Methodist readers, will be, Was the Christian ministry never entertained as a desirable solution? Robert's father was a minister, and most ministers cherish the hope that one at least of their sons may follow their own profession. Moreover, the very atmosphere of the manse, with its unworldly ideals and altruistic sympathies, commonly suggests the ministry as the most covetable of callings. In young Perks's case, these influences must have been strengthened by his long association at Kingswood with other youths who all, without exception, came from Methodist

preachers' homes. How potent this combination of forces has proved in many instances is seen in the fact that of two thousand six hundred and twenty-three boys who attended Kingswood and Woodhouse Grove (the latter also formerly a denominational school for ministers' sons), six hundred and seven, or more than twenty per cent., have since entered the service of some branch of the Christian Church, at home or abroad.

But high as has ever been Sir Robert's respect for the vocation which his father so conspicuously adorned, it does not appear that at any time he himself felt any call in that direction. And his characteristic good sense told him that without a divine call the position was nothing short of bondage. On the other hand, his father, with his particular ideas of parental training, never suggested it. He, too, felt that if the call came it must come from above. On one occasion, Sir Robert says, his father partially bared his heart on the subject. One of Mr. Perks's colleagues in the ministry had just called, and Robert and his father were left talking alone in the study.

'Bob,' said the latter, turning suddenly to his son, 'I think that the devil never tempts

a Methodist preacher more severely than when he tries to make him think that his son is called to the work of the ministry.' Then, after a pause, he added: 'It is just what the preacher wants to think. It is the dearest wish of his heart. The devil comes when he does not know what to do with his boy, and offers him an easy entrance into a profession for life.' That, however, was as far as the matter ever went.

After leaving King's College, then, in 1871, the young man found himself once more at a loose end. A splendid education, a constitution like iron, and an unbounded belief in his own future, all these he possessed: but he still lacked the one thing which could turn them to account—a definite life-purpose. It was at this juncture and in circumstances which seem almost fortuitous, that a suggestion was made which at length supplied his need and turned his pent-up energies in the right direction.

Residing in the Highbury Circuit at this time was Sir Francis Lycett, known to the world at large as leading partner in a famous glove firm, but better known among Methodists as one of the founders of the Wesleyan

Metropolitan Chapel Building Fund. Between this gentleman and the Rev. G. T. Perks, who for a time was superintendent of the circuit, there was naturally some intimacy. When Sir Francis was Sheriff of London, in 1867, Mr. Perks acted as his chaplain. It was out of this friendship that the aforesaid suggestion was made, and it came about on this wise.

The young man was walking one morning in Highbury Park, when he was accosted by his father's friend, who, after some general inquiries, asked whether he had yet decided what he was going to do. Receiving a negative reply he said: 'Well, I think you would make a lawyer. I am going to the City to-morrow morning to see my solicitors, and if you like to come with me I will see if they have an opening for you, if you would care to be articulated to them.' Having consulted his father, the next day he accompanied Sir Francis to the office of Messrs. De Jersey & Micklem, a highly respectable, old-fashioned City firm practising in Gresham Street.

The senior partner of this house, Mr. Henry de Jersey, was the son of a French Methodist minister. He was a Low Churchman of somewhat narrow views. Though his legal know-

ledge was not profound, his knowledge of men, and especially City Corporation people, was unrivalled. He never missed a City function, big or little, and his affection for the Guildhall was 'passing the love of women.' He lived to a great age, and left a small fortune. The second partner, Mr. Thomas Micklem, was a Baptist. He was a very able lawyer, and a farmer to boot, owning a considerable estate in Hertfordshire.

No difficulty was experienced in finding Robert a position with the firm, and he commenced his duties and studies forthwith. His articles cost three hundred pounds. Speaking some years ago, at a meeting of lawyers, about his experiences in this law office, he said : ' I well remember standing in the dusty little outer office, waiting to be ushered into Mr. Secondary de Jersey's august presence. On the wall I saw an ordinary wooden kitchen clock, bearing this ominous inscription : " This clock was presented to the firm of De Jersey & Micklem in acknowledgement of their services in conducting successfully the case of *Brown v. Jones*, carrying this case from the Queen's Bench to the Court of Appeal and thence to the House of Lords, where judgement

was given for the plaintiff." I thought: Is that all?'

It was now that his training in essay-writing under Dr. Brewer stood him in good stead; for during the next four years he received no remuneration, and had perforce to support himself by journalism. The famous Preacher of the Rolls had done his work well. The young law-student was possessed of a crisp, epigrammatic style, which he was now able to turn to good account in articles and reviews contributed to various newspapers. Two notable articles written for the *London Quarterly Review*, one on the French military system, and the other on 'Modern Municipalities,' attracted considerable attention. During each of these strenuous years, he calculates, he earned in this way fully two hundred pounds.

I have said that the years were strenuous. That they must have been so the reader can judge for himself. One of Sir Robert's old schoolfellows, who was in touch with him in these days, says it was no uncommon thing to find his friend reading law at five in the morning, and this often after he had been working late on the previous night. As a matter of fact, Sir Robert made it an inflexible rule

never to be in bed of a morning after five. To enforce this rule when heavy duties and late hours pleaded hard for its suspension, he invented an ingenious device. This consisted of a long glass tube filled with water, nicely balanced over his head and attached by a string to an alarum. At the desired hour the bell rang and awakened the sleeper ; if within a few seconds he did not leap from his bed and avert the calamity, the descending weight of the clock destroyed the balance of the tube, and down poured the water on his guilty head.

Another faculty besides that of immense industry was now soon to be brought into play. Although he had received no special training in this direction, he developed a singular gift of draughtsmanship, by which in a short time he was able to execute a sketch or a plan with considerable precision. The way in which this talent came into use not only throws an interesting light upon Sir Robert's character, but also might well form a contribution to the romance of modern railway enterprise. He had noticed that the successful men in law, in medicine, and in literature, were the men who specialized. Railway

construction had always been a favourite study: now came his chance for railway law.

The underground railways of London were then being constructed, so with no little zest he began to acquaint himself with their history. The District Railway in those days, coming from the West, stopped at Mansion House. The Metropolitan line, coming from Paddington, stopped at Moorgate Street. The latter, which was the older and richer company, was pushing its way forward to Bishopsgate Street, but the less fortunate District line was short of money and stood still.

An Act of Parliament, however, had been obtained for a new line, called 'Newman's Line,' coupling up the two railways by running up Queen Victoria Street, and thence *via* Cornhill to Aldgate. To the study of this and other Acts, Sir Robert gave up all his leisure. He made himself master of all the interests involved, and waded patiently through all the Acts of Parliament, as well as the contracts made with the public bodies whose rights, real or imaginary, were protected. The fascination of the subject grew upon him. He drew sketches of what appeared to him to be improvements in the route, and devoted whole

Saturday afternoons to surveying the affected properties.

The strange thing about all this is, that he had not the slightest motive for all his labour, except that the subject interested him. The firm to which he was articled had no railway business, neither did they practise in the Parliamentary Committees. But as events proved, his work was not thrown away. Within four years from the expiration of his articles he was the legal adviser of the Metropolitan Railway. This position was worth from three to four thousand a year, and Sir Robert retained it for fifteen years, resigning it when he entered Parliament, in 1892. Anticipating somewhat the course of events, I may here interpolate a few particulars of some of the important duties in this capacity which devolved upon him.

The Metropolitan system at that time ran no further north than Brondesbury, and one of the first tasks he had to perform was to take charge in Parliament of all the struggles to extend the line first to Harrow, then to Pinner and Rickmansworth, and ultimately to Aylesbury. He negotiated the purchase of the old Aylesbury and Buckingham Railway

and the Metropolitan and St. John's Wood line. The policy of the Board was to convert what was purely a London line into a suburban railway—a policy which secured to the Metropolitan a long lease of prosperity, only to be disturbed, as it so rudely was, by the advent of electricity as a motive power for railway purposes.

During Sir Robert's legal connexion with the line, the Inner Circle—the name recalls many entertaining stories, which, however, I must not stop to relate—was completed, and extensions of the Metropolitan Railway were projected and constructed to Whitechapel, and, under the London Hospital, to East London and New Cross. Two important extensions of the line which he fought successfully through Parliament were never made. One was a short railway from Brondesbury to Hendon, and the other, one from Aylesbury to Oxford.

His intimate knowledge of the London railways, and especially of the underground lines, raised him, in 1901, on the death of Mr. J. S. Forbes, to the Chairmanship of the Metropolitan District Railway. The company was then about to embark upon the very

doubtful but necessary policy of converting its system from steam to electric traction, and Sir Robert presided over the destinies of the line during the three critical years which this enormous operation occupied. His duties brought him into close contact with leading English and American financiers, who provided the necessary funds for the work. When the transformation was effected he retired in favour of the Chairman who was entrusted with the task of operating the line when ready for traffic.

The gigantic nature of these and the allied electrification schemes will be understood when it is stated that capital amounting to sixteen million pounds sterling was involved. In addition to the financial negotiations, however, Sir Robert had to submit to Parliament the numerous proposals of the different rail- and tramways, and to guide the promoters of these extensive systems in their various agreements with the local authorities and other parties affected. Whoever has benefited by the construction of these important London lines, certainly the travelling public have no reason to complain, albeit some inevitable grievances, such as overcrowding, have yet to be redressed.

But to resume the thread of my story. Sir Robert soon turned his knowledge of London to good account in other directions than railway enterprise. The commercial instinct, which, however it may be denounced by those who lack it, is merely power to see opportunities, combined with courage and ability to use them, was in him early developed and sagaciously applied. Five-and-thirty years ago some of the large estates which are now covered with thriving metropolitan suburbs were only just beginning to be laid out for building purposes. Sir Robert, like many other wide-awake men, interested himself to advantage in some of the more promising schemes. He also made some judicious deals in house property, occasionally reselling his purchases at a profit without having so much as seen the deeds. But all through the years his penetration has saved him from becoming identified with unsound or questionable undertakings. In a letter some years ago to the *Glasgow Herald* on the Limited Liability Acts, he made incidental reference to this fact.

‘During the last twenty years,’ he wrote, ‘I have acted professionally for public companies, many of them manufacturing and

trading concerns, with an aggregate paid-up capital of more than a hundred and fifty million pounds. In only one case has any of these companies gone into liquidation, and that was one with a capital of less than ten thousand pounds. The companies which have in my experience been managed with the greatest care, enterprise, personal attention and success, have been the "private" rather than the "public" companies. One of the main elements of success has, however, been the presence upon the directorate, and in the management, of men holding a substantial interest in the ordinary or unprotected stocks.'

On leaving De Jersey & Micklem's, in 1876, Sir Robert at once entered into business for himself, in partnership with his father's friend, Mr. Henry Hartley Fowler (now Lord Wolverhampton), and Mr. Charles Corser. The latter retired in 1879, but the association with the former extended, on terms of the closest intimacy, over a period of five-and-twenty years. The locality chosen for the new business was Leadenhall Street, the reason being that Sir Robert had made a speciality of mercantile and Admiralty law. Moreover, his father had invested some money in steamships, upon

the advice of a Methodist shipowner ; and this gentleman had buoyed up his guileless friend with the hope that directly his son opened his office the legal business of at least one shipping firm would pour through its portals. The hope was never realized, however, for the worthy man, who bore a well-known Methodist name, never gave Sir Robert six-pennyworth of work to the day of his death. One wonders whether this and other like experiences can have been in Sir Robert's mind when he framed his Methodist Brotherhood proposals, referred to on a later page.

In commencing business for himself he made some rather curious rules, which had not a little to do with his financial success. He determined never to handle Criminal business. County Court and Divorce Court work was also declined. He shut the door to building societies, and he discouraged lady clients. He once told a friend that in the whole course of his experience he had never done legal work for more than three ladies. This singular prejudice, so far as legal matters were concerned, against the gentler sex, was based chiefly upon a lively recollection, in no way dimmed even at the present day, of a

doctor's widow who used to visit the firm to whom he was articled. This lady, who might for her persistency have served as the prototype of Miss Flite, in *Bleak House*, invariably pulled out her knitting, was always accompanied by an extremely talkative daughter, and without exception grumbled immoderately at her bills.

Business at first did not come pouring in. Indeed, for several months the prospect was by no means promising. A story is told on good authority of a little incident which took place at this juncture, while he was still living with his parents, and which illustrates his indomitable faith in the future. The dearth of business was such that, out of feeling for his father, who plied him nightly with questions as to what the day had brought forth, he somewhat dreaded the homegoing. One day Mr. Perks saw it announced that his son had promised fifty pounds to some church fund, and anxiously inquired where the money was to come from. 'Oh,' came the reply, with apparent indifference, 'it will be all right; it will come from somewhere.' Next day, runs the story, he had a client who paid him a hundred pounds.

It was during a short holiday at Llandudno,

in the summer of 1877, that he met with his first piece of good fortune, and this he owed more to his own push and enterprise than to any merely fortuitous combination of circumstances. Wandering round the district, he observed the Conway tubular and suspension bridges. Curiosity led him to read up the engineering and commercial history of these two well-known structures, one of which belonged to the Crown and the other to the North-Western Railway. The former, administered by the Treasury, was crushed by a heavy debt, and it levied usurious tolls, which killed trade and handicapped traffic.

Sir Robert was sitting one afternoon in the coffee-room at the hotel where he was staying, when up drove a four-in-hand. Its four occupants had just paid monstrous tolls, and were angry and excited. They cursed every one connected with the bridge. Sir Robert listened at the next table, and in a quiet interval interposed.

‘Gentlemen,’ said he, ‘I think if you tolerate such a state of things you richly deserve all you get.’

The travellers stared in amazement. ‘What is to be done?’ they asked.

‘ If you will allow me, I will tell you.’ And Sir Robert proceeded to unfold a plan for taking the bridge out of the hands of the Crown, cancelling the huge debt, vesting the property in local commissioners, reducing the tolls and increasing the revenue.

The gentlemen proved to be the late Lord Penrhyn, then Mr. Douglas-Pennant, Sir Richard Bulkeley, Lord-Lieutenant of the county, Mr. Buckley Williams, M.P. for Anglesea, and a Mr. Wood, a rich dye-maker. So struck were they with Sir Robert’s suggestion, that they engaged him on the spot to bring into Parliament the necessary Bill, which he successfully carried the following session, after striking a good bargain with the late Lord Derby, then Financial Secretary to the Treasury. The only commercial point which the Treasury of those days seemed not to grasp was, that by reducing tolls you increase revenue.

Lord Penrhyn afterwards recommended Sir Robert to the Marquess of Bristol, who was connected with some railway projects in the Eastern Counties. For many months Lord Bristol, his brother, Lord Francis Hervey, and Sir Robert, used to make periodical visits

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to the Rutland Arms, Newmarket. The last-named has on more than one occasion astonished his friends by saying that in his earlier days he was a frequent visitor to the famous racing town. Lord Penrhyn's success over the Conway Bridge helped him to win the county seat for his party at a subsequent election. He never forgot Sir Robert's services, and it was through his friendship indirectly that the latter ultimately made the acquaintance of one whose business connexions contributed perhaps more liberally than any other to Sir Robert's fortunes. I refer to the late Sir Edward William Watkin, of whom more will have to be said in the following chapter.

It was when business began at length to flow into the Leadenhall Street office, as just narrated, that a heavy blow fell upon Sir Robert's Highbury home. Of his six sisters, two had died very young, one at Perth and the other at City Road. His eldest sister, a girl of great beauty and remarkable culture, passed away at the age of three-and-twenty. Death was now to claim the head of the house.

On Saturday, May 26, 1877, the Rev. G. T. Perks travelled to Rotherham to preach on the following day the annual missionary sermons.

By one of those singular coincidences to which our forefathers would have given a distinctly religious interpretation, he preached on the Sunday evening upon the solemn subject of death, and was addressing some long-remembered words of comfort to any among his auditors who might have been bereaved, when he was himself struck down with fatal illness. Sir Robert was sent for, and shortly after his arrival the honoured servant of God, with a smile on his lips, and clasped in his son's arms, passed peacefully away, saying: 'Bob, my boy, tell mother it is all right.' This triumphant scene, crowning a life of exemplary devotion and integrity, made an impression upon Sir Robert which has never left him, and which has perhaps more profoundly influenced his whole career than any other personal force with which he has come in contact.

In the succeeding year the little circle was yet further decreased by the death of a fourth sister; and with Sir Robert's marriage in the following spring the Highbury home was finally broken up. Of the two surviving sisters one died in middle life, leaving six sons and three daughters; the other now lives at Beckenham. Sir Robert's only

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brother, Mr. George D. Perks, followed him into the legal profession, and when Sir Robert retired from practice some years ago succeeded to the business which he and Lord Wolverhampton had built up.

So eventful a step as Sir Robert's marriage must not be passed over without a further word. Among his fellow students at Mr. Jefferson's school at Clapham was William Mewburn, son of a well-known and generous Methodist layman, Mr. William Mewburn of Wykham Park, Banbury. It was on a visit to the home of his school friend that Sir Robert first met his wife, Mr. Mewburn's youngest daughter, Edith. The wedding took place on the bridegroom's birthday, in April, 1878. The President of the Wesleyan Conference, the late Dr. W. B. Pope, conducted the ceremony, assisted by two Ex-Presidents, both close friends of the bridegroom's family, the Rev. Dr. Jobson and the Rev. Dr. Morley Punshon. Mr. (afterwards Sir) John Lawson Walton, a Wesleyan minister's son, acted as best man, making a speech that is still remembered; while the bride's health was proposed by Sir Robert's partner, the present Lord Wolverhampton.

CHAPTER IV

MEN AND MATTERS

IN the course of his long and active business career Sir Robert has enjoyed the confidence and friendship of many distinguished men, but none stands out more conspicuously in this respect than Sir Edward Watkin, the famous railway potentate, and Mr. Thomas Andrew Walker, an equally talented railway contractor. With both he had for many years the closest relations, and to them he owes more, from a business point of view, than to any two other men.

I have spoken of his friendly associations with Lord Penrhyn. These brought him into contact with another well-known Conservative peer, Lord Cranbrook. In the summer following his wedding it fell to Sir Robert's lot to introduce to the South-Eastern

Railway Board a deputation of the Cranbrook Railway to protest against the action of Sir Edward Watkin's company. His language on the occasion is said to have been more forcible than convincing, but at least it had one good effect—it made a favourable impression upon the famous railway magnate. Six months elapsed, however, before Sir Robert's chance came.

On the following Christmas Day he was sitting at dinner at Wykham Park, when a telegram was put into his hand. 'Sir Edward Watkin arrives in London to-night from Manchester, and wishes to see Mr. Perks at Cleveland Row on important business.' Sir Robert handed the message to his wife. It was their first Christmas together after their marriage, so who can blame her that she suggested postponement? Her father supported her. 'Wire saying you will be there to-morrow,' said he.

But Sir Robert saw that his opportunity had arrived, and at six o'clock that same evening he was waiting in the railway magnate's library. 'I wondered if you would come,' was the latter's only comment, as he pulled off his heavy fur coat. From that day

forward for fourteen years Sir Robert was by Sir Edward Watkin's side in all his battles. Business simply poured into his lap. For all the railways over which Sir Edward held control, and they were not a few, he was employed, and it is interesting to know that on one occasion only did he seriously differ from his chief on a question of railway policy. This was concerning the costly extension to London of the Great Central Railway, then the Manchester, Sheffield, and Lincolnshire line.

The course advocated by Sir Robert was to extend the Metropolitan Railway northward to meet the Sheffield line, then coming south from Nottingham and Leicester to Rugby. This plan would have given the latter company running powers over the Metropolitan line to Baker Street Station, which, after enlargement, would have served as a terminus for both. Instead of this conservative and manageable scheme, the extension to London was undertaken, at a cost of many millions. It is whispered that personal ambitions and antipathies had more to do with the adoption of this course than considerations of expediency or finance.

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The acquaintance of Mr. T. A. Walker was made in the spring of 1880. Sir Robert was standing one afternoon on Appledore railway platform with Sir Edward Watkin, when the latter, pointing straight across the Romney Marshes to Lydd Church, whose square tower was visible in the distance, exclaimed: 'Perks, we ought to have a railway right across there. The land is perfectly flat, and the cost would not be great. I should like to find some one to build such a line. I would work it for the South-Eastern Company and guarantee the stock.'

At once the idea flashed into Sir Robert's mind, Why should not he build the road? And turning to Sir Edward he said: 'If you will allow me, sir, I will build it.' Sir Edward was considerably startled, but he took his friend at his word and allowed him and his relatives, whose aid was enlisted, to execute the project. Neither party had reason to regret the result.

But the question arose, Who should be employed to construct the line? Sir Edward Watkin advised the appointment of Mr. Walker, who at that time was busy building the Dover and Deal Railway, and the counsel

proved in every way wise. This was Sir Robert's first attempt at practical engineering, and it formed the commencement of an intimate friendship with Mr. Walker which lasted till the latter's death. The well-known contractor was a Christian gentleman in the highest sense, and a scholar of no mean order. Quiet and resourceful, he inspired to an unusual degree confidence in his ability to deal with difficult problems.

Sir Edward Watkin professed to be a great admirer of the Methodists, but he had not a very rigid belief in the sanctity of Sunday. 'Shortly after I was made the lawyer of the Metropolitan Railway,' said Sir Robert at a Sunday Observance meeting a few years ago, 'Sir Edward Watkin came down to Blackpool one Saturday afternoon with his wife, and, coming into the lodgings where I was staying, said he wanted me the next day to go through all the papers for a railway Bill, and get the briefs ready for counsel. I told him I never did legal work on Sunday. 'Then what,' said he, 'is the use of such a lawyer?' I replied that if he would hand all the papers to me the work should be done by midnight, and on Monday morning I

would get up early and have all ready. This was done, and I was never asked again by the Chairman to work on Sunday.'

The friendship was fruitful in connecting Sir Robert with a number of public works of considerable magnitude, both at home and abroad. The first of these was the Barry Docks and Railways in South Wales, in dealing in the 'paper' of which he is said to have 'made a little fortune.' The great change wrought in the locality by these undertakings, which have given employment to tens of thousands of people, will appear from the fact that prior to their commencement the site now occupied by the great coal docks and the important town of Barry was mainly green fields; with the exception of an old farm-house or two, a country residence in the valley, and a quiet church, not a building was to be seen. The docks now ship hundreds of thousands of tons of coal every year, and the town is one of the most prosperous and progressive in South Wales.

The Preston Docks and the Manchester Ship Canal were other big concerns with which Sir Robert and his friend were con-

nected. The contract for the latter was let for a sum of £5,600,000. At the time of Mr. Walker's decease, in 1888, some two millions of this amount had been spent. During the following year nearly two million pounds' worth of additional work was done. Mr. Walker's executors subsequently came to an arrangement with the Canal contractor to retire from the work, which they were glad to do, it is said, with a very insignificant profit.

Their largest and most successful undertaking, however, was the great Harbour works at Buenos Ayres, for the Argentine Government. These were started in 1887 and completed only five years ago. They involved the turning of the mud banks of the River Plate, for a distance of three miles in front of the city, into a magnificent series of docks, locks, and quays, with numerous gigantic warehouses and railway sidings, and up-to-date equipment; and the dredging of two deep channels from the dockside out to sea for a distance of seven or eight miles. Mr. Walker's death so soon after the commencement of the work threw the responsibility for its completion upon the shoulders of

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Sir Robert and his present partner, Mr. C. H. Walker, who now constitute the firm of Messrs. Walker and Co. It is gratifying to think that these vast works, costing nearly eight millions sterling, fell to a British firm. They reflect equal credit upon that progressive and prosperous young nation, the Argentines, and upon the courage and enterprise of English contractors ; for the undertaking is perhaps the largest ever essayed abroad by a British firm.

Messrs. Walker & Co. are evidently bent upon maintaining their reputation for handling with success gigantic schemes, for they are now constructing a magnificent quay wall, several miles long, round Rio Bay, for the Brazilian Government—a work of great difficulty and magnitude. They are also piercing the Andes between Argentina and Chile, so that soon these two neighbouring Republics will be connected by railway, and passengers will be able to travel through from Buenos Ayres to Valparaiso without change of car.

Incidentally it may be stated that Sir Robert and his partner, in connexion with their South American business, own extensive

estancias in Uruguay, with many thousands of cattle and sheep. They are also the owners of large granite quarries in Uruguay and Brazil, with railways, piers, and numerous steamers.

In this connexion, too, it may be mentioned that in recognition of his many services in the engineering world, Sir Robert was many years ago elected an Associate Member of the Institute of Civil Engineers. This is a distinction which has fallen to few men outside the profession. His proposers were Sir John Hawkshaw, Sir John Fowler, and Sir James Brunlees.

Among the other notable personalities with whom his many interests brought him into contact, was the late Comte de Paris, the eldest son of King Louis Philippe. The first business of importance which Sir Edward Watkin entrusted to him, after that memorable summons from the Christmas dinner-table, was an expedition to France, to prepare a confidential report on the Northern of France Railway, and on the possible accommodation at the little seaside town of Treport for a Channel steam service. He was also instructed to continue negotiations then in

progress between Sir Edward and the Orleans Prince for the purchase of the latter's interest in the Treport railway. The acquisition of that interest would have given to the South-Eastern Railway an important length of line running direct to Paris. On several occasions Sir Robert saw the Comte de Paris. On one of them the latter gave him a highly graphic account of the landing at Treport of a large flock of English sheep. Sir Edward's venture unfortunately proved abortive, partly through the enterprise of the Northern of France Railway, but mainly owing to the internal feuds then raging among members of the South-Eastern Board.

The Channel Tunnel scheme will long rank as one of the most fascinating projects in the history of British enterprise. Sir Robert was entrusted with the difficult, indeed the almost impossible, task of passing the original Channel Company Bill through Parliament. He fought for the scheme against the Crown, and also took charge of it when it came before a joint committee of the two Houses, on which occasion it was rejected by a majority of one only, viz. five votes to four. The chairman of this committee, who prepared a

Gladst. - War with France

Reason of surprise

Spis End of the Tunnel

Why not? { a great subject of
the war

Land Fortification

{ how 1. Advantages

2 Disadvantages

{ Conditions of Peace
in 1884

Spontaneous war - Cant. Darnac stated
however that the French government were
desirous before granting the concession to
be assured that the British Government had
no objection to the course proposed.

On 24. Dec. 1874. Lord Derby
having first consulted the Board of Trade
wrote to Lord Lyons: —

"The time appears to have arrived
when it is desirable that Her Majesty's
Government should determine whether
they ought to encourage this undertaking
or if so upon what conditions."

"Of the utility of the work in question
if successfully carried out there appears

masterly and voluminous report upon the Tunnel project in its commercial, political, engineering and military aspects, defending and advocating it on all grounds, was none other than the leader of the Conservative Party in the House of Lords and the late Foreign Secretary, Lord Lansdowne.

This, of course, was more than thirty years ago, when the project had the support of many leading statesmen. John Bright, for example, was a warm friend. Mr. Gladstone, too, with whom also Sir Robert came into frequent contact, was a convinced and enthusiastic believer in the commercial and political advantages of direct railway communication between England and the Continent. He attached little importance to the alleged military dangers. Indeed, on more than one occasion he declared that a time might come when the existence of such a connexion might be a source of military strength to this country. Sir Robert still retains a lengthy manuscript which he prepared for Mr. Gladstone, and which is covered with the notes used by the famous statesman in his defence of the project in the House of Commons.

Another distinguished personage whom Sir

Robert met at this time was M. Leon Say, who naturally looked at the scheme from the French standpoint, and moreover from that of an economist of the Cobden school. He had the pleasure on one occasion of travelling with the distinguished Frenchman to the head of the Tunnel, more than a mile beneath the Channel, to show him Colonel Beaumont's shield steadily cutting out the grey chalk; a work which Mr. Chamberlain and the Board of Trade stopped. The one topic of interest with Monsieur Say was the political and social value of the Tunnel. Commercially, he apparently thought it would benefit France but little—rather the reverse.

Lord Randolph Churchill occupied a somewhat equivocal position in regard to the project. True, he was a shareholder in the company formed by Lord Stalbridge, then Lord Richard Grosvenor, for building the Tunnel; but he readily took strong likes and dislikes. 'I hate Watkin,' he once exclaimed to Sir Robert; and that was at one time the only reason he assigned for opposing the scheme. In one of the debates in the House Sir Edward, in a weak moment, suggested that the Tunnel might be exploded at any time by an electric

button, placed upon the Cabinet's table in Downing Street. This was too much for Lord Randolph, who had recently left the Ministry. He passed in cynical review one after another his late colleagues, asking if this one or that would ever dare to 'touch the button.'

A more friendly personage was M. Ferdinand de Lesseps, who, in particular, made light of the engineering difficulties. Indeed, no competent engineer from first to last really hesitated on this point, the stratum beneath the Channel being one continuous belt of grey chalk, which can be cut through like cheese. One day when they were discussing this aspect of the question Sir Robert unwittingly annoyed his chief. Sir Edward had been saying that Providence had laid that stratum there for the express purpose of giving easy access to France, whereupon Sir Robert, with characteristic incisiveness, reminded him that Providence had also placed there a turbulent and treacherous sea.

During the progress of the fight M. Lesseps came over to London. He knew what some of the classes thought: he was anxious to ascertain the view of the masses. To gratify him, a number of working men, carefully

selected, were invited to meet him at the Charing Cross Hotel. As the distinguished Frenchman was led up the room by Sir Edward, they were astonished to hear the British workmen shout out in continuous and rhythmical strains, 'Vive la France—Vive le tunnel sous la Manche—Vive le tunnel—Vive la France !' It subsequently transpired that an active official of the company had spent several hours teaching the men thus to express their views. Naturally Monsieur Lesseps went back to France with a passionate belief in the intelligence of the British working man and in his desire to avoid the Channel passage.

Here again, it has been stated, personal jealousy and rival interests did more to wreck the scheme than any question of national danger. One of London's greatest financiers once declared that his firm had never made a serious blunder except where they had allowed their commercial instincts to be warped by personal prejudices. It would be interesting to extend this remark to all the public works of the United Kingdom, and to inquire how many important undertakings have been made or marred by the private ambitions of rival magnates.

When a more recent attempt was made to pass a Channel Tunnel Bill Sir Robert assumed a somewhat different attitude. He supported the Government in its discouragement of the project. The necessity for the work, he contended, was not so great now as it was thirty years ago, owing to the shortening of the sea passage, the enormous development of cross-Channel traffic, and the great diversion of trade via Liverpool to Continental ports. Moreover, popular sentiment was strongly against the enterprise, a fact that might involve the country in military expenditure which the commercial advantages could hardly justify. This scheme was to cost sixteen millions. The earlier one, engineered by Sir Edward Watkin, involved a cost of only seven millions, and this sum Sir Robert succeeded in getting guaranteed in London and New York, without underwriting, in forty-eight hours.

Latterly Sir Robert has had large business interests in Canada, where he is represented by his nephew, Mr. George Volckman, at Ottawa. Another nephew, Mr. J. D. Volckman, of Chatham, New Brunswick, represents him on the New Brunswick Pulp and Paper

Mills, at Millerton, on the Miramichi River, which are owned by Sir Robert.

He is now taking an active part in a scheme for the construction of a great ship canal in the Dominion, to which scheme Sir Wilfrid Laurier has pledged his Government. It will cost at least twenty million pounds, and will connect the big Canadian lakes with the St. Lawrence by a deep waterway, utilizing for this purpose the French, Mattawa, and Ottawa Rivers. When this canal is cut vessels drawing twenty feet will be able to steam all the way from Liverpool to Chicago, or to Fort William and Port Arthur, and the produce of the North-Western regions will reach English or Continental ports without breaking bulk. Should Sir Robert succeed, the canal will rank, as an engineering feat, with the Suez and Panama Canals, while for the boldness of its conception, the vastness of its processes, and the far-reaching nature of its results, it will be one of the wonders of the world. What it may mean to the working classes of this country, in the way of cheaper fruit and bread, is an interesting topic into which there is no need to digress.

In 1907, in connexion with this big project,

Sir Robert paid two visits to Canada and the States, travelling over the route of the proposed canal from end to end. On his first visit he had an interesting interview with President Roosevelt. They discussed together various political questions, the social work of the Methodist Church, the possibilities of religious equality in England, railway matters, and industrial combines. Sir Robert was greatly impressed with the President, whom he described in one of his letters as 'the strongest personality at the White House since the days of Abraham Lincoln.'

A more exciting experience, which occurred on his second visit, was a narrow escape from a forest fire. He had occasion to go from North Bay, a small town on the shores of Lake Nipissing, to Trout Lake, a distance of seven or eight miles ; and he set out, accompanied by a friend, a Canadian-French engineer, in a Canadian buggy drawn by a fine pair of horses.

'We had driven,' he wrote, 'some three or four miles along the country mountain track, when I noticed a cloud ahead.

' "What is that dark cloud?" said I.

' "Only some homesteaders making a clearing," answered my friend.

‘ As we got nearer, the clouds were denser. The air was hot. We heard the bracken crackling, and here and there saw flames suddenly shoot up.

‘ “ Don’t be concerned,” said the driver ; “ I’ll pull you through all right ”—for by this time we were enveloped in smoke.

‘ My friend kept his word, for in half an hour we were through the zone of fire with no more discomfort than sore eyes and somewhat stifled lungs. We little thought what was in store for us on the homeward journey. On we drove some miles, and in a few hours turned homewards.

‘ Far ahead we could see the dense masses of smoke, blackening the sky for miles. Driving a mile farther we met three or four youths running to escape the bush fire, which was quickly spreading. They told us we could not get through. Our French engineer assured us he could get the horses through, if we would only trust him, and away we shot, the horses snorting and palpitating with fear. All around us the forest trees were in flames. The heat was like a blast furnace. Had the wind driven the flames across the road nothing could have saved us. Providentially it was blowing the

other way. I noticed on our right a tall pine ; the fire had burned all round the roots. The tree was swaying, now to the right, now to the left. If it fell to the left it would block our road, or fall on us. In either case we could not have escaped. I watched the great tall burning mass sway gently to the right, lean for a moment against the telegraph wires, and then crash down wires, posts, and all.

‘ We came to a wood trestle-bridge. The ends of the beams were all on fire. I felt certain that our car when it reached the centre of the bridge would carry the whole structure right down into the stream. The horses, terrified out of their lives, bolted, almost leapt forward—we were across the bridge, and in ten minutes were through the fire, with singed hair and blistered faces to remind us how near we had been to death.’

Sir Robert’s long experience of London railways and of the many problems connected therewith, gives some weight to his views on London traffic in general. This was recognized by the Royal Commission on this complicated question, which sat in 1905–6, and before which he was called to give evidence. Among other recommendations made by him

at the time was the appointment of a Traffic Board, to deliberate on such matters as the improvement of the main roads and the effect on the rates of the depreciation of property caused by the unregulated condition of heavy traffic.

In regard to the latter, he pointed out that the vacation of property on the affected thoroughfares, or the appreciable reduction of its value, substantially reduced the municipal exchequer ; while at the same time the cost of maintaining the roads was, owing to the heavier wear and tear, perceptibly increased. A considerable share of the taxation for road repairs ought therefore to fall upon the traffic using the roads. Furthermore, particular classes of vehicles ought to be restricted during certain hours to specified thoroughfares. By this means would be abolished that extraordinary civic anachronism, the holding up of important traffic in the middle of the day by a snail-paced van.

On the question of main roads he also enlarged. The tendency at present is for these to lose themselves directly they reach the suburbs. Sir Robert would have them judiciously extended and increased in number, and

finally coupled up by a great boulevard encircling the whole city.

A further problem arising out of the rapid growth of the London suburbs is that of cheap fares. As this is a matter upon which in certain quarters Sir Robert has been greatly misrepresented, it may be well here to define his position. The crux of his alleged offence is that, presumably in the interests of dividend-hunters, he has advocated the raising of workmen's fares. In an interview in one of the morning papers some time ago, he exposed a fallacy upon which, in part, this accusation rests. 'The English railways,' he said, 'do not, as is commonly supposed, belong to a few wealthy capitalists. The stock is held by a multitude of small investors, whose average holding does not exceed a thousand pounds; while very large quantities of stock are also held by insurance companies and friendly societies, who have invested in this way the savings of the working and the middle classes.'

It was reasonable, therefore, he continued, that railways should be run at paying rates. He cited the case of the District Railway, which, since its inauguration, had carried more people than the whole population of the world,

and yet, with the exception of one year, had never paid the Ordinary shareholders a halfpenny dividend. It was, in fact, carrying seventeen millions of working men each year at a loss. This was bad for the employés of the company, themselves working men ; and it was bad for the investors, many of whom (friendly societies and the like) represented the most thrifty section of the same class. Any unreasonable reduction of fares, therefore, was in such cases just putting money in the workman's right-hand pocket by taking it out of the left ; or even worse, penalizing the thrifty for the sake of those whose financial habits were unknown.

Yet it is not so much the raising of fares that Sir Robert advocates, as their readjustment. In New York there is a twopenny-halfpenny rate for everybody ; all are treated alike. The city clerk, who, though he is better dressed, is not always better off, is not made to pay for the working man's ride ; and the shop-boy who goes to work after eight does not have to pay three or four times the fare his workman father pays. It is a scale of fares without these arbitrary and unreal distinctions that Sir Robert desires to see established.

So far, indeed, from being indifferent to the welfare of the working classes, either in this or in any other matter, Sir Robert has in many ways laboured to promote it. In railwaymen, in particular, at home and abroad, he has always interested himself. When he succeeded to the Chairmanship of the Metropolitan District Railway, unlike some other railway directors he invariably adopted a conciliatory attitude towards the men's association. Mr. Richard Bell met the Board on several occasions, and existing difficulties, some of them rather serious ones, were amicably adjusted without friction by a little giving and taking on both sides.

Interviewed by *The Sheffield Independent* on the railway dispute of 1907, Sir Robert said : ' During the last twenty years it has been my lot to be associated with some of the largest public works in the world, and my partners and I had in our employment many thousands of men. I am to-day closely connected with some big enterprises. I have never refused to meet the representatives of the union, and have almost always found that the disputes were capable of solution. I look upon a strike or a lock-out as an economic barbarism, which

hardly ever does either employer or employed any good. Huge losses are incurred on both sides far exceeding any pecuniary sacrifices which a settlement might entail. When I landed in New York, the wharfingers were on strike. Italians were imported, and the standard rate of pay fell. When I returned to New York the hotel porters were on strike. In Canada, the telegraph operators struck. I do not think any one gained anything. Mr. Bell, as I understand his contention, does not seek to interfere with the management of the lines, and if he is prepared to limit his representations to the conditions of employment, I can see no reason why the directors should refuse to meet him. Unfortunately, most of the directors of English railways are men who have not personally had a commercial or business training. They are as a rule opposed to trade-unions. If they knew more of the rough-and-tumble of life, they would perhaps not assume such an inexorable position.'

On more than one occasion Sir Robert has at his own expense entertained large bodies of workmen. At the Austrian Exhibition a few years ago, for example, he entertained

upwards of three hundred Austrian and Hungarian railwaymen at Earl's Court. He has also shown great generosity to those whose misfortunes or misdeeds have brought them to distress. The following incident was related to me by one intimately acquainted with the case. A young man got into disgrace through drink. Sir Robert heard about it and determined to give him a chance to regain his self-respect. At some personal sacrifice he found him a position, but imposed the condition that he should become an abstainer. The young man kept the pledge for a time and then broke down. Sir Robert, however, gave him another trial. He broke down again, and yet a third chance was given him. Happily, this time Sir Robert's forbearance was rewarded, and to-day the man in question occupies a position of honour and responsibility in which his influence is wholly for good.

CHAPTER V

METHODIST LAYMAN

HAVING followed briefly the course of Sir Robert Perks's professional and commercial interests, from their modest beginnings in De Jersey & Micklem's office to their almost world-wide developments, we must now retrace our steps to indicate another line of activity simultaneously pursued by him with equal ardour and, throughout one notable period at least, with an extraordinary expenditure of time and energy. I refer to his services to Methodism.

One of the early fruits of his discreet upbringing, in which, as we have seen, the emphasis was laid upon high example rather than upon moral cramming to achieve its ends, was that at quite a youthful age he took an active part in the life of the Church. Little

imagination is needed to see what would have been the result upon a nature such as his of a catechetical and introspective training. Like thousands of other self-reliant lads he would have revolted, or at any rate have nursed his resentment until parental restraints were removed, and then turned in repugnance to secular concerns. His father's way was better. By discussing with him almost on terms of equality the affairs of the Church, interest was developed from within, rather than enforced from without.

At sixteen, therefore, we find him employing his gifts, with a devotion rare in one so young, in Sunday-school work at Highbury. He acted as secretary and librarian; and subsequently as the teacher of a large class of youths. He was also instrumental in starting a school at Green Lanes, of which he became superintendent. To such work among the young he devoted the greater part of the scanty leisure of six-and-twenty years.

At Highbury, too, an idea occurred to him which has since borne good fruit. He noticed that the annual meeting of Methodist preachers' children was not turned to practical account; so in concert with the late Dr. Robert

Newton Young, he started the Preachers' Children's Association, based on the principle of a five-shilling donation from every Methodist preacher or preacher's child. It was a family affair, and subscriptions outside the magic circle were neither asked nor taken. This useful fund has been the means of bringing help for close upon thirty-five years to numberless Methodist ministers' children. The democratic principle upon which it was founded, namely, 'each person five shillings,' was adopted later, in 1898, when the Twentieth Century Fund was started on the basis of 'one person one guinea.'

On his removal after his marriage to Chislehurst, where he had built himself a residence, Sir Robert led for fifteen years, to use his own words, 'the regular, quiet, unostentatious life which a hard-working professional man crowded up with business must lead.' 'Methodism, my business, and my home,' he adds, 'absorbed all my attention.' The share claimed by Methodism was by no means inconsiderable, compared with what most men similarly placed find themselves able to give. A handsome Gothic church had been built at Chislehurst some ten years previously,

and here gathered a little group of Methodist laymen whose names have since become household words in the denomination. Sir Clarence Smith, the late Mr. James Vanner, his brother, Mr. William Vanner, and Sir George Hayter Chubb, were all of the number. In 1881 Sir Robert and Sir George were joint society stewards of the church, and in many other relations they and their colleagues worked earnestly for the good of the community.

These, it must be remembered, were among Sir Robert's most militant days, and his pronounced views and unequivocal speech made him at once a terror to evildoers and a spur to them that did well. There is indeed a tradition that his zeal led to his being made an 'exhorter.' The tradition also adds that for some reason or other he was eventually 'struck off the plan.' As Sir Robert at one time and another has had a good deal to say about preachers and preaching, this bit of gossip seemed to promise some biographical data of uncommon interest; but diligent inquiries have elicited nothing, save that in 1884 he was temporarily appointed to conduct services in certain outlying villages then being evangelized, there being a shortage of local preachers quali-

fied for such pioneer work ; that his superintendent minister, the Rev. Wesley Butters, promised not to worry him about coming on 'full plan' ; and that in 1892, when the necessity for these special labours ceased, his 'note' was voluntarily resigned. It is worth mentioning, however, that during this period he interested himself particularly in a Sunday school at the little village of Widmore, and that as the result of his labours its roll was increased from forty to more than three hundred. Sir Robert at this time was of real assistance in the Sunday night prayer-meeting ; and in all good work throughout the circuit he and his devoted wife were ever ready with sympathy and service. By the older Chislehurst residents he is still spoken of with respect and esteem.

To complete what may be called the domestic side of his Methodist life, it should be said that when he removed to Kensington, some fifteen years ago, he at once attached himself to the church at Denbigh Road, Bayswater. Here he has held numerous offices and has taken an influential part in the circuit administration. Inevitably his social eminence and Connexional reputation have given him



11, KENSINGTON PALACE GARDENS, SIR ROBERT PERKS'S TOWN RESIDENCE.

[Face p. 100.]

a leading position among his fellow members ; but it is admitted on all hands that his sway is wholly genial, and his long tenure of office has been entirely at the wish of his brethren. Ministers who have travelled in the circuit declare that nowhere is Sir Robert more popular or more beloved than at Bayswater.

Friends have also furnished me with many instances of his kindly interest in all who are in any way connected with the circuit, and of his practical concern for the well-being of the ministers. Once, during a time of special prosperity, when unusually large congregations were gathering, he moved for the increase of the preachers' stipends, on the ground that it was not fair for the church to appropriate all the proceeds of its ministers' popularity. The salaries were accordingly raised. Some one objected, however, that it might be hard, when less popular preachers came into the circuit, to maintain so high a standard. But the objection was overruled, Sir Robert pledging himself personally to 'look after the ministers' ; a pledge which, I am informed, he generously fulfils.

Personal kindnesses of a private character

are still more numerous, but for obvious reasons cannot be divulged. The following incident, however, is typical. Some years ago, a man holding a responsible position in the City, whose wife was a member in the circuit, was foolish enough to attempt a petty fraud on the Metropolitan Railway, but was detected, and in due course was summoned to appear before the magistrate. The minister, in the course of a casual visit, discovered the trouble into which the family had been plunged. The wife was in deep distress ; her husband's position and her own good name were alike imperilled.

Aware of Sir Robert's connexion with the railway, the minister promised to see what could be done, and hurried away to Kensington. Unfortunately, his friend was out of town, and had left strict instructions that his address was not to be made known. The urgency of the case, however, prevailed, and a letter was at once dispatched to Sir Robert asking him, for the sake of the man's wife, to use his influence to stop the proceedings. This was on the Saturday ; on the following Tuesday the case was to come into court. On the Monday word was received from Sir Robert

that he had done as requested, and that instead of the man being prosecuted he himself would admonish him in person. While picturing the culprit's relief at his lucky escape, one can imagine his feelings under the alternative ordeal.

Acts of this kind are, of course, simply what one would expect from a Christian gentleman of position and influence; the only distinction is that in Sir Robert's case, according to his friends, they have been more than usually numerous, and display on his part a delicacy of feeling of which those who know him only in business or in debate might not think him capable. For the rest, he is, when at home, a diligent attendant at public worship; he prefers sermons neither too theological nor too consciously 'up-to-date'; while in regard to the form of service, his tastes lie in the direction of simplicity and informality rather than ornateness and ceremony.

Turning now to the wider aspect of his relation to his Church, we find him occupying a position at once unique and influential. For many years he has been regarded as the outstanding representative of the laity of Methodism. It is only fair to say, however,

that, much as his own energy, wealth, and love of liberty may have served to win him this position, they have not wrought alone. At an early age the honours of leadership were voluntarily bestowed upon him, and on a hundred important and historic occasions he has been singled out to fill the position of chairman or principal lay speaker. His first Methodist public speech, for example, was delivered from a platform which included men so distinguished in their time as Dr. Morley Punshon, the Rev. Thomas Champness, and Mr. S. D. Waddy, Q.C., M.P. This was in 1877, at the centenary of the stone-laying of that Methodist Mecca, City Road Chapel, when he was only eight-and-twenty. His speech on that occasion showed few signs of immaturity, and adumbrated in a remarkable manner some of the principles for which he has since steadfastly contended.

‘In some sense I seem to represent,’ he said, ‘a generation of Methodists who have not yet been called to discharge the duties and obligations of the Church—that next generation, to whose keeping will in due time, I presume, be entrusted the sacred ark of our Church’s constitution.’ Having spoken of the principles

for which, in his opinion, Wesley's Chapel stood, he proceeded: ' Let us rejoice in that peculiarity of our Church, that, while its principles are fixed and unalterable, its plans of administration are flexible and progressive. What the next great popular movement of Methodism may be I cannot tell, but I think the day is not far distant when there will come forth an earnest and invincible desire to reunite all those sections of the Methodist family which have become separated and dispersed.' He concluded with a characteristic warning against the ' sensuous displays ' which he perceived to be growing up in the worship of other Churches. Methodists must not loiter on the King's highway to watch the ' marionettes of religious society,' but must cling to the simple and sublime services handed down to them by their fathers.

From that day forward his position as a leading layman was assured. It fell to his lot to take part, together with such eminent leaders as Dean Farrar, Dr. Clifford, Dr. Monro Gibson, the President of the Wesleyan Conference, and other distinguished ministers, in the public dedication of Wesley's House, in 1898 ; and to propose the toast of ' The Closing Century,'

to which Sir John Lubbock and Dr. Joseph Parker, representing respectively Science and Religion, responded, at the reopening of Wesley's Chapel, after the renovations, in the following year. He has also twice served—in 1881 and 1901—as lay delegate to the Œcumenical Methodist Conference, on the first occasion acting as Secretary of the Publication Committee, and on the second as one of the Treasurers. Relating his experience in the former capacity he said: 'I remember that the Rev. W. Arthur drafted the "Note by the Editors" which appears on the first page of the report of the proceedings of the Conference. Mr. Arthur concluded his note with a hope that the perusal of the report would "advance the cause of the Redeemer by inspiring the followers of Christ and *John Wesley* with greater zeal in working for the conversion of the world.'" "Don't you think, Mr. Arthur," I said, "that it would be better to leave out John Wesley and let Jesus Christ stand alone?" "Yes," replied the veteran missionary, striking his pen through the name of Methodism's human founder.'

¶ Sir Robert has consistently advocated the claims, and championed the cause, of those

devoted men who, without fee or earthly reward, consecrate their time and talents to the office of local preacher. He has paid many glowing tributes to the value of their services, and has more than once asked that they, with other unpaid workers, should receive greater recognition upon occasions of public importance. Thus in 1901, when the Conference was about to offer a loyal and dutiful address to King Edward on his accession, Sir Robert urged that the deputation charged with the duty of presenting the address should not be drawn exclusively from the official and titled elements of Methodism, but should consist, conjointly with the President and Secretary of the Conference, of some of the men who had borne the burden and heat of the day. He suggested that the oldest local preacher, the oldest class-leader, and the oldest superintendent of a Sunday school, should be included, rather than that an attempt should be made to impress the Throne by sending only doctors of divinity and representatives of the titled class.

These democratic views, and his passionate dislike of anything resembling a priestly conclave, led him some ten or more years

ago to advocate the admission of professional reporters, representative of the general Press, to the Conference sessions. The question had been raised at the instance of the Institute of Journalists, which appealed for the removal of an anomalous embargo. A committee was appointed by the Conference to consider the matter, but its report pronounced against the appeal, on the ground that those already accredited to forward intelligence were better qualified to deal with the topics discussed than professional reporters could possibly be. Sir Robert repudiated the idea, which the exclusion of the general Press tended to promote, that the Wesleyan Conference was a secret assembly in which mysterious things were sometimes done that ought not to get abroad. He pleaded for a wider dissemination of the reports of its proceedings, arguing that members of the Conference would speak under greater responsibility if they felt that what they said would be published on the housetop.

One of Sir Robert's outstanding characteristics is his faith in his Church. While some men, as they have risen in life, have forsaken Methodism at the dictates of a despicable

pride, Sir Robert has cleaved to it with reasoned and growing conviction. The ill-conceived desire to graft upon Methodism the ecclesiastical usages, titles, and ceremonial of the Anglican Church, in the belief that by so doing Methodists would 'assert their equality,' he has denounced with withering scorn, and to it he attributes the alienation of thousands of his Church's educated and thoughtful sons. On account of its elasticity and ready adaptability, Methodism, he believes, is the most popular and effective form of organized Christianity in the United Kingdom. 'Her pastorates,' he once said, 'are not "livings," and her preachers are not hirelings; they do not mutter ancient shibboleths; they have not to rely, for the effect of the proclamation of the gospel, upon sensuous externals. They have won their way to the hearts, and enjoy to-day the confidence, of the British people, because they live the gospel they teach.'

Years ago, when a reception was given to the Conference at the London Guildhall, he told an interviewer :

' Personally I do not attach much importance to Methodism's receiving the patronage either of the State or of the great municipalities,

or even of Royal personages. The great charm of the Methodist Church since its foundation by Wesley has been its independence and its reliance on the support of the masses of the people. We have never fawned upon the aristocracy, nor have the aristocracy patronized Methodism. We do not trouble ourselves very much because the President of the Conference is not officially invited, like the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Chief Rabbi, or Cardinal Vaughan, to the Queen's Garden Parties. Our laymen are there in large numbers, simply as prominent politicians or citizens. But it must not be forgotten that the City of London was in its most progressive and brilliant days the staunchest patron that Nonconformity ever had, and it is most gratifying, therefore, to any Free Church to see its Chief Assembly entertained by the Corporation of the first city of the Empire. The reception, therefore, of the Wesleyan Methodist Conference by the Corporation marks one of those new stages in the recognition of Methodism as one of the most vital moral and social forces of the age.'

Sir Robert once had the pleasure of expounding the origin and economy of his

Church to the late Mr. W. E. Gladstone, who proved to be a deeply interested inquirer. As the incident possesses an interest all its own, and has been told by Sir Robert himself at some length, I quote it here *in extenso*.

‘About ten years ago I happened to be at a dinner-party with Mr. Gladstone. My neighbour, Mr. John Morley, who was sitting between Mr. Gladstone and me, was unexpectedly called away to the House of Commons about ten o’clock, and as he rose to leave he whispered to me: “Slip into my chair and talk to the Old Man.” Mr. Gladstone noticed me doing so, and turning round suddenly and facing me, he said:

“You are a Methodist, Mr. Perks, are you not?”

“Yes, I am, Mr. Gladstone,” I replied.

“Do you belong to the Old Body?”

“Yes, I belong to the original foundation of Mr. Wesley; but, Mr. Gladstone,” said I, smiling, “we call it a Church and not a Body.”

“Ah,” he replied, heaving a deep sigh, “that raises an issue which has perplexed all Christendom. But now,” said the old man, resting his elbow on the table and placing his hand to his ear, “tell me, Mr. Perks, how

many sections there are of your Methodist Church (smiling as he used the word, as though he thought he was pleasing me), and then tell me what were the causes of their various secessions ; and then tell me what are their doctrinal differences ; and then explain to me their various distinctive ecclesiastical usages."

' I was alarmed at the long vista which the question opened up, but there was Mr. Gladstone waiting, with his hand to his ear, expecting from a Methodist layman, then less than half his age, an instantaneous and complete answer.

' So I plunged right into the absorbing subject. I explained the rise of the New Connexion, the birth and growth of Primitive Methodism, the origin of the Bible Christians, the sad conflicts which led to the splitting away of the Free Methodists and the Reformers. Mr. Gladstone listened intently, saying very little. At length he said :

' " Now, Mr. Perks, we will leave the past and deal with the present. What are your doctrinal differences ? "

' " We have none, Mr. Gladstone," I replied.

' " Would to God," said the aged statesman, " that my beloved Church could say the same."

‘ We had got thus far in our talk when a little incident happened, which showed the veteran Liberal leader in an aspect which was at the time a revelation to me, for I had never associated Mr. Gladstone with humour, though in after years I had more than one opportunity of witnessing in the House of Commons his marvellous command of humorous but withering satire.

‘ At the dinner-table there was a man sitting exactly opposite, who did not like the conversation. He wanted Mr. Gladstone to talk about something else. So, interposing, he asked what seemed to me a very silly question.

‘ “ Do you know Chester, Mr. Gladstone ? ”

‘ “ Yes, a little,” was the reply, an ominous smile playing about the mouth. “ Do you know Chester, Mr.—— ? ”

‘ “ Not very well,” said the unwary questioner.

‘ “ Well, if you go to the city of Chester you will find a confectioner’s shop in such a street (and Mr. Gladstone gave the number). Go into that shop and you can buy a hot mutton pie, deliciously hot (and here Mr. Gladstone screwed up his eyes, and his face beamed with

delight as he recalled the taste and smell of those savoury pies), and all for threepence.

“ “ Now, Mr. Perks,” said he, turning again to me and speaking in a deep, sepulchral voice, “ let us resume where we left off.”

‘ We talked an hour that night. We discussed the effect of the itinerancy upon the Church, the relative powers of the clergy and the laity, the tests of membership, and the doctrinal standards of Methodism.

‘ Mr. Gladstone did not forget our talk. Some years after, alluding to a subject we were talking about, he said :

“ “ This is not so interesting, Mr. Perks, as the penny a week and the shilling a quarter ! ” ’

CHAPTER VI

AT CONFERENCE

AT the Wesleyan Conference for the last thirty years no layman has occupied a more prominent and honoured position than the subject of this book. For the last thirty years,—because prior to 1878 the laity were not admitted to the august assembly, but sat only in minor councils chiefly concerned with finance. When, in that year, after much discussion and amid the woful forebodings of some of the more conservative leaders, the momentous change was made, Sir Robert was among the representatives sent by the First London District, having been elected at the top of the poll. He boasts that with but one or two exceptions, when business engagements abroad prevented him, he has attended every Conference since. This diligence has been

dictated at once by a deep personal interest in the government of his Church, and by a desire to justify the confidence reposed in him by his fellow Methodists.

One of the first questions to engage his attention as a member of this supreme court was the order of the two sessions, the Pastoral and the Representative, into which the Conference was now divided ; and, arising out of it, the election of the President. This, though at first sight a mere matter of procedure, involved the deeper and more delicate question of the relations of the ministry and the laity ; and as a public-spirited, democratic member of the latter, Sir Robert felt called upon to play his part in the controversy.

At first the Representative Session met at the close of the Pastoral Session, when much of the business had already been discussed. The laity soon found that this arrangement did not leave them the freedom to which they felt themselves entitled, for although the business in question was not finally decided, it had been given a certain shape, from which it was difficult to recast it. A movement was therefore started to secure the reversal of the order. To its other advantages, it was hoped

that this change would add that of giving the laymen a voice in the election of the President. The contending parties fought with some warmth. Dr. Rigg, who took a leading part in the controversy, ultimately achieved what was called the 'Sandwich Compromise,' an arrangement by which the Representative Session was sandwiched between the two sittings of an interrupted Pastoral Session.

This arrangement, however, was by no means satisfactory; it kept ministers who were not members of the Representative Session waiting about until the Pastoral Session was resumed, and it still deprived the laymen of a share in the election of the President. Sir Robert crossed swords with Dr. Rigg, strongly resenting the claim of the ministers to the exclusive right of discharging this function. He as strongly advocated the abolition of the compromise, on the twofold ground that it wasted time, and that the initiative on questions of Methodist public policy ought to be taken by an assembly of both ministers and laymen, rather than by a purely clerical Conference. In the end a compromise of another kind was effected. The original order was inverted by the Repe-

sentative Session meeting first, but the Pastoral Session retained its control of the election of the President by his being nominated a year in advance.

It should, perhaps, be added that in advocating the rights of the laity, Sir Robert in no way shared the old jealousy of the rights of the ministers which was so marked a feature of certain agitations of the past. He holds that the minister, being divinely called to his office, is not a servant of the layman, and that he cannot be too highly esteemed for his noble and disinterested life and work.

The year that marked the admission of the laity to the Conference, marked also the inauguration of a Thanksgiving Fund, to commemorate the notable fact that so fundamental a change in the constitution of the Church had been effected without the loss of so much as one minister or member. The fund was completed in 1883, and towards its total amount of £297,500 (three hundred thousand guineas was the sum aimed at) Sir Robert subscribed, 'in memory of his revered father,' the sum of five hundred pounds, besides promoting its successful issue in many other ways. This generous gift, made after

he had been started in business for himself little more than two years, has since been followed, as all the world knows, by others, whose aggregate amount must total many thousands of pounds. Yet, although one of the most liberal men in Methodism, it is not his monetary contributions which have been most valued or most fruitful. He has figured more largely in the Connexional eye as a man fertile in ideas and fearless in their exposition. Of this, crowning proof will be given in the next chapter. For the present we may resume our survey of the principal movements which have had the advantage of his advocacy.

Wesleyan Methodist readers will not need to be told of the important services rendered to their Church by the Committee of Privileges, a body of which Sir Robert has been a valued member for over thirty years. The Committee was first appointed at the Conference of 1803, in connexion with the inquiry then made, 'How may we guard our religious privileges in these critical times?' In the previous year, when England was threatened with invasion, an Act was passed empowering the King to call out the military and militia to practise the martial exercises on the Lord's Day.

Through Methodist influence a clause was introduced into the Act exempting from duty those persons who conscientiously regarded such exercises on that day as a violation of the law of God. It was to discharge, with full official sanction, such functions as this, that the Committee aforesaid was formed; nor has it since, as the vigilant guardian of Methodist rights and privileges, long lacked employment. Sir Robert's extensive Parliamentary practice, as well as his shrewd estimate of men and measures, often enabled him to render the Committee unique service; and his brethren marked their sense of his value by appointing him in 1879 Lay Secretary of the Committee of Exigency (a sub-committee of the larger body), and in 1882 Lay Secretary of the Committee of Privileges itself—a position which he held without interruption for ten years.

Seeing that he early fell under the spell of London, it is not surprising that Sir Robert has for many years been officially identified with the Metropolitan Chapel Building Fund, the London Mission, the London Mission-Band Union, and indeed with almost every movement which has tended to the extension and con-

solidation of London Methodism. There is probably not a circuit in the metropolis which he has not assisted with his wonted generosity. But he has taken equal interest in provincial missions, both those located in the great towns and industrial centres and those that minister to scattered rural populations.

His relation to Foreign Missions has some features of special interest. A subscriber to the Wesleyan Missionary Society from his youth, and for some time a member of its Committee, he watched with keen interest the succession of crises through which, prior to 1906, the Society passed. In 1888, for example, its finances were in a somewhat critical condition, there being a debt of nearly £17,000. There was a good deal of wild speaking; withdrawal and retrenchment were talked of, and the whole condition of the Society was described as one of 'breakdown.' Sir Robert repudiated such pessimistic counsels, and welcomed criticism as likely to lead to nothing more serious than a wholesome revision of methods. Two years later affairs were more critical still, attention now being centred upon matters of policy. Foreign Missions in general and Indian Missions in particular were faced

by accusations of a grave personal nature, the agents of the Society being charged with living luxuriously and with overbearance towards the natives. On this occasion he moved for a searching inquiry, which happily resulted in the vindication of the missionaries and a more careful organization of the Society's personnel.

But at the Nottingham Conference of 1906, when the Society was once more under a heavy incubus of debt, he did a thing at which the ears of every one that heard it tingled, not with dismay, but with surprise and joy. At a critical moment he rose and confessed that for the past sixteen years his attention had been devoted almost exclusively to home affairs, that after some heart-searching he had come to the conclusion that his annual subscription of only ten pounds to the Society was quite unworthy of him, and that, by way of amendment, he would in future give five hundred pounds. He then resumed his seat, covered his face with his hands, and remained bowed and alone.

This quiet self-accusation, by one not given to needless penitence, had a profound effect upon the Conference. It was the signal for what will henceforth be known in Methodism

as the great Missionary Revival. Touched by the confession and animated by a like spirit, men sprang to their feet in all parts of the house. In a few hours the entire deficiency was wiped out, and a sum of four thousand pounds in additional annual subscriptions was promised. The Press blazed the news abroad, and everywhere, outside Methodism as well as within it, a new zeal for Missions burned. To commemorate the event, a great Thanksgiving Meeting was held, on his suggestion, in the Royal Albert Hall in the spring of the following year, Sir Robert, as was fitting, being one of the speakers. Needless to say, when he rose, the gratitude of the assembled thousands found suitable expression in round after round of cheers.

Methodist Union he advocated as early as 1877, in his first Methodist public speech. Let it at once be said, however, that although a convinced believer in the ultimate reunion of the various Methodist bodies, and an enthusiastic supporter of the federation of the Churches for defensive and aggressive purposes, Sir Robert is too hard-headed to be sanguine as to the achievement, within measurable distance at any rate, of that organic reunion

of Christendom, about which there was such weak and wasted sentiment at the time of the Grindelwald Conferences. Here he ran counter to some of the clerical leaders of his own denomination, who contended that Methodism was not unprepared to accept an episcopal form of government, provided that the reordination of her ministers was not made imperative. He had little difficulty, however, in showing that such a notion was entirely opposed to the deepest convictions of the Methodist rank and file.

In regard to Methodist Union pure and simple, he has advocated a more active policy on the part of the parent body than some of his ministerial brethren have altogether favoured. At the Camborne Conference of 1903 a committee was appointed to confer with the three minor Methodist bodies—namely, the Methodist New Connexion, the United Methodist Free Church, and the Bible Christians then negotiating with a view to union, as to the possibility of all three uniting with the Wesleyans. With the report of this committee, presented to the Conference of 1904, Sir Robert, in common with many other Methodists, was much disappointed. He felt

that its mere re-affirmation of the general principle of Methodist Union did not satisfy the feeling of the rank and file of his fellow Wesleyans. He therefore moved a resolution which, albeit for obvious reasons it provoked a good deal of dissent, was rightly described at the time as 'the first really practical step ever taken by the Wesleyan Conference towards Methodist Union.'

This resolution, which was ultimately carried by 311 votes to 91, was warmly opposed, on the ground that it invited—so it was alleged—one of the Churches already negotiating among themselves for union, to break away from its friends and enter into similar negotiations with the parent body. This, however, was more than Sir Robert intended. He was under the impression—and the facts advanced at the time would certainly seem to support such a notion—that the New Connexion would hail with satisfaction any advance made by the Wesleyan Conference in the direction of union. Although there can now be little doubt that Sir Robert had been misled as to the true state of New Connexion feeling, a good deal of the opposition to his resolution unquestionably arose from a reluctance on the part of

the more conservative Wesleyans to make any concession in constitutional matters, and also from a modicum of that pride which, to use the phrase of one distinguished speaker, restrained 'a great body like theirs' from approaching 'a little body like that!'

The resolution in its final form was modified by the addition of two qualifications, which invited the New Connexion Church to confer with the parent body only in the event of its proving during the ensuing year to be free and wishful to do so; and which insisted that in the terms of union the separate functions of the Pastoral Session, as then existing in the Wesleyan Church, should be preserved. On this latter point Sir Robert was as inflexible as any of his ministerial brethren. In fact, on one occasion he said: 'No greater blow could be given to the rights and powers of the Wesleyan laity than to constitute one session of the Conference. The Pastoral Session is not only a necessity; it is, in my opinion, the surest guarantee of the supremacy of the power of the Representative Session.'

The reply of the New Connexion Conference to these overtures was singularly dignified. After the usual expressions of fraternal feeling,

it declared its inability to separate from friends with whom it had been in negotiation for close upon three years, and explained that it could not unconditionally accept the Pastoral Session of Conference, such session being opposed to a constitutional principle from which it had never swerved. When this reply was read to the Wesleyan Conference, in 1905, Sir Robert moved a resolution wishing the three uniting Churches God-speed, and expressing a hope that in framing the constitution of the new United Methodist Church, no steps would be taken which would interfere with or retard union in the future with the mother Church and with the Primitive Methodists. This resolution was also carried.

In Wesleyan Methodism for many years some dissatisfaction has been felt with the rigidity of the statutory term of ministerial appointments to circuits. According to Wesley's Deed Poll, no minister can have the use and enjoyment of Wesleyan property at one time for more than three years. Whatever advantages this limitation may possess, it is obvious that circumstances must sometimes arise in which it is beset with serious drawbacks. Consequently, there have long been those who

advocate an application to Parliament for such a variation of the Deed Poll as would obviate the difficulty. The present subterfuge, declared by counsel to be legally defensible, by which the rule is suspended in exceptional cases, is far from satisfactory to many minds, by whom, indeed, it is regarded as a piece of ecclesiastical casuistry. The question has therefore been more or less prominently before the Connexion for the last sixteen years.

As a member of various committees appointed to deal with it, Sir Robert has taken no inconspicuous part in its discussion. He has also, on more than one occasion, placed his professional experience at the service of the Church. Of those who favoured an alteration of the existing system, some advocated the abolition of all definite limit to the term of appointment, suggesting that the Conference should be left with a ' free hand ' ; others pressed for a definite extension of the term. In either case, it was clear, an appeal would have to be made to Parliament, and in 1896 Sir Robert was asked to state what should be the method and what would be the cost, of such an appeal. Seeing that in 1876

his partner and he had been empowered to obtain the Methodist Conference Act of that year—a measure which enabled the Conference to grant home rule to Colonial Methodism—the matter was one which he was well qualified to handle. He therefore discussed it with the counsel to the Lord Chairman of Committees, in the House of Lords, and with the Speaker's Counsel, the Chairmen of Committees, and the head of the Public Bill Office, in the House of Commons; and advised that the application would have to be by a private Bill, complying with all Standing Orders applicable to such Bills, and that the cost ought not to exceed three thousand pounds, and might be considerably less.

But the question, it seemed, was not to be thus summarily settled. Sir Robert himself strongly favoured an extension of the term, chiefly on the ground that it would increase the ministers' influence in large country circuits, where under existing conditions they could visit some of their chapels only twice or thrice a year; that they would thereby be able to take a more influential part in public affairs, a point on which they were at a disadvantage with other Free Church ministers;

that their influence would tell more powerfully upon the young people of their congregations ; and lastly, that the existing three years' system encouraged the lazy preacher to serve up in each of his circuits the pabulum of bygone days.

But he was as strongly averse, on the other hand, to the complete abolition of a time-limit. The proposal to give Conference a 'free hand,' he contended, meant that the whole ecclesiastical patronage of the Church would be handed over to the Pastoral Session, and that the statutory safeguards which the Quarterly Meetings and trustees at present possessed in the Deed Poll would be swept away. In this contention he was supported by a large and influential body of laymen. Consequently in 1896, in the hope of solving the problem, he suggested a middle course, which he hoped would at once meet all requirements and avoid prolonged and profitless controversy. His proposal was to apply to Parliament to amend the clause in the Deed Poll which dealt with the term of appointment, by substituting the word 'six' for the word 'three' ; the circuits to retain identically the same right to invite their ministers for terms

not exceeding six years, as they previously had for periods not exceeding three.

Objections, of course, were not hard to find even to this proposal. It was urged that six years would unquestionably become a limit to be aimed at in every case, whatever might be the fitness or otherwise of the minister concerned. And it was contended that this longer term would, after all, only exchange one strait-waistcoat for another. But behind all the objections on either side lay a greater difficulty—namely, that of obtaining anything like substantial unity in the Connexion at large on so vexed a question ; for it was clear that without substantial unity Parliament would not be induced to pass a Bill of any nature whatever. At the Conference of 1897, therefore, it was decided to proceed no further in the matter, and for the time being it dropped. Although it has been raised in succeeding Conferences the same difficulties have presented themselves, so the matter is still in abeyance.

Though in early life a regular attendant at the weekly class-meetings, Sir Robert has come to feel that, precious as the institution is on account of the unique opportunities it affords for devotion and fellowship it is not in

itself an adequate test of Church membership. He has therefore been in sympathy with the movement in recent years for the broadening of the basis of membership. In the Conference of 1907, in particular, when the question was before the Connexion in an acute form, he pleaded with great passion for a wider Methodism, a Methodism that should make it possible for his own children and the children of thousands of other families all over the country, to enter conscientiously and freely into membership. Against many of these young people, naturally affected by the prevalent modernism, Methodism, he declared, by making the class-meeting co-extensive with the Church, at present barred the door.

This protest against too rigid an adhesion to the methods of the past he has often raised, affirming that the 'glorious irregularities' of Methodism have been the secret of its success. Some of its most treasured institutions, he points out, originated in unofficial quarters and on unauthorized lines, two notable cases being the National Children's Home and Orphanage and the London Mission-Band Union. The former, as the reader knows, originated with that honoured friend of little

children, Dr. T. B. Stephenson, whose Christ-like philanthropy could not wait for, nor be arbitrarily confined by, official sanction ; while the latter, viewed at first with grave suspicion, was the outcome of a spontaneous desire of the young people of Methodism to encourage and extend mission work in the metropolis. At its first meeting, which was officially unrecognized, Sir Robert presided, and he has acted ever since as its Treasurer. How great would have been the loss to Methodism, in the latter instance, and even to the world, in the former, had either of these movements been frowned out of existence, it is not easy to compute.

I have reserved to the close of this chapter a brief account of Sir Robert's keenest and perhaps most characteristic fight. It arose out of an attempt made some years ago to establish in Methodism a system of 'Separated Chairmen,' or, as he preferred to put it, 'to impose an episcopate upon the Connexion.' This battle was as short as it was sharp, the whole manœuvres covering little more than twelve months, and the actual fight considerably less.

The question really sprang out of the need for some rearrangement of the five-and-thirty

Districts into which Wesleyan Methodism in England, Scotland, and Wales is for administrative purposes divided. At the Cardiff Conference of 1893, Dr. Rigg moved for the appointment of a committee to deliberate and report to the following Conference 'as to the possibility—by some rearrangement of the Districts and by any other means that may be found advisable—of providing for the greater efficiency and consistency of district administration.' So far every one was agreed. The dynamic forces that now began to work first disclosed themselves at a meeting of the committee, held in the following December. A scheme was submitted by Dr. Rigg which at once threw the Connexion into a state of considerable agitation.

The chief feature of this scheme, so far as its details were formulated, was the grouping of the thirty-five Districts for certain purposes into thirteen larger ones, over which 'Separated Chairmen,' or ministers of outstanding ability and experience, set free from circuit work, were to be appointed. The ordinary Chairmen of districts were to retain their title and some of their powers, but their more important functions, including that of presiding at the two

half-yearly Synods, were to be transferred to the 'Separated Chairmen.'

Inoffensive as these proposals may at first sight appear, it was strenuously held that beneath them lay principles totally at variance with the fundamentals of Methodism, and subversive of the rights of both ministers and laymen. Doughty champions led the hosts on either side. Dr. Rigg was ably supported by the Rev. Hugh Price Hughes and Dr. T. B. Stephenson ; but opposing them were men of equal intelligence and repute—the Revs. C. H. Kelly and Charles Garrett, both Ex-Presidents and men holding high official positions, the Rev. J. Ernest Clapham, chief of the Home Mission department, and the Rev. Thomas Champness, founder of the important evangelistic movement which now has its centre at Cliff College ; while at the head of the lay opponents strode Sir Robert Perks.

The latter fought with voice and pen, for the controversy found its way not only into the denominational papers but also into the general Press. His principal and most effective literary weapon, however, was the famous pamphlet, 'No Methodist Bishops,' which appeared in the early days of January 1894.

This document, though it exposed him to the accusation of imputing motives, is in all other respects an admirable example of his skill in dialectics. Even after the lapse of fifteen years its life and vigour, its incisive logic and biting humour, amply reward one for its perusal.

The charge of imputing motives rested chiefly upon his remarks on the composition of Dr. Rigg's committee and the manner of its appointment. In these he claimed to find evidence of a carefully preconcerted design to foist the 'hideous and objectionable' scheme upon the Connexion by stealth and strategy. He had no difficulty in making out a strong case. Especially did he see in Dr. Rigg's phrase, 'by any other means that may be found advisable,' a veiled reference to a proposal which as yet it was considered ill-advised openly to declare; while in the nomination of the committee from the Conference platform, instead of its election by the Districts or by the Conference itself, and in the fact that the nominees comprised seventeen ministers holding official positions, as against only nine circuit-travelling ministers, he thought he perceived a design to 'pack' it with men likely to favour the proposed changes.

Briefly, the grounds upon which he opposed the scheme were: that there was no popular demand for such an episcopal system, which was indeed repugnant to the rank and file of Methodism; that it was subversive of the rights of ministers and laymen; that the withdrawal of thirteen 'picked men' from circuit work would be a drain the circuits could not reasonably bear; that the new order would come seriously into conflict with their existing Chairmen, Superintendents, and Quarterly Meetings; that the thirteen 'Separated Chairmen' would be under no effective control, and no guarantees could be provided for the proper discharge of their duties; that they would be the nominees of the Conference; that the scheme would cost more than Methodism could afford; and lastly, but not the least important, that the creation of a bench of Wesleyan bishops would alienate the Wesleyan Church from Nonconformity and render Methodist Union impossible. In view of these facts, he inquired of the promoters of the scheme, Why agitate Methodism?

The whole matter, of course, duly came before the Conference of 1894, when the report of the committee was presented. An interest-

ing episode occurred early in the session. One of the members called attention to the fact that a copy of 'No Methodist Bishops' had been enclosed in the parcel of private papers sent according to custom to each representative a few days before the Conference; and contended that this was very 'irregular.' Sir Robert's opponents warmly resented what they naturally regarded as an exhibition of misguided zeal; but their grievance vanished, if their indignation was not assuaged, when he explained that the mistake occurred through a publisher's error, and that he himself knew nothing of the matter until, to his great astonishment, he too received a copy in his own parcel.

A spirited debate took place. The supporters of the scheme fought hard and well, denying that the proposals would involve any new organization or the creation of a new order; but Sir Robert's amendment, rejecting the whole project, seconded by the Rev. Charles Garrett, who confessed himself alarmed at the 'passion for change' which the movement revealed, was carried by a large majority. A suggestion, prior to the voting, that both motion and amendment should be withdrawn,

and the entire question referred to an enlarged committee, was adroitly met by Sir Robert firmly refusing to withdraw.

A curious fact may here be mentioned as illustrating how inseparably Sir Robert's name was associated with this famous fight. A 'very godly and upright Methodist society steward,' who resided in a remote part of the country, and whose knowledge of men if not of measures needed some revision, wrote to the Ex-President deploring the proposals of the committee and suggesting that 'The very best thing that could be done at this crisis would be to unite universally to elect Rev. R. W. Perks to the Presidential chair.' He concluded by affirming : 'Perks's election will inspire confidence and save the Connexion.'

CHAPTER VII

THE MILLION FUND AND THE METHODIST BROTHERHOOD

THE greatest episode, however, in Sir Robert's life as a Methodist, was the inauguration and completion of the famous Twentieth Century Fund. Of this great undertaking he himself has written: 'It absorbed nearly three years of my time, and was the most arduous, anxious, and successful religious or philanthropic enterprise in which I was ever engaged.'

This is not the place to attempt a history of the fund, but so closely was it interwoven with Sir Robert's life that considerable space must be devoted to it. Briefly, the movement was intended as a fitting celebration of the dawn of a new century, by a Church anxious to vindicate at once its devotion, and its

determination to keep abreast of the progressive movements of the time. The method adopted was the raising of one million pounds, afterwards changed to one million guineas so that the odd shillings might cover expenses. The fund was to be divided among various departments of church work then existing, as well as to promote new enterprises which lack of means had hitherto delayed. Among the latter, the most conspicuous was the erection of a monumental building, which, while serving as the Connexional head quarters and a centre of evangelistic and social effort, might also be a suitable rendezvous for Methodists from all quarters of the world.

This huge scheme, though necessarily dependent for its development and execution upon the sagacity and toil of other men, appears to have originated exclusively in Sir Robert's own fertile brain, and certainly owed more to his financial genius, extraordinary penetration, and dauntless optimism, than to the mental and moral qualities of any other man. But even in his own mind the idea developed gradually. It was first broached, somewhat indefinitely, at a private dinner-table at the Leeds Conference of 1897, when

it made a favourable impression on some of the Connexional leaders, who happened to be present. It was further mentioned in the Representative Session of the Conference, during a discussion on the proposed sale or reconstruction of the Mission House—project to which the want of adequate denominational head quarters gave special urgency. Fearing that this step would postpone if it did not finally defeat his larger scheme, Sir Robert at first opposed it. But when it was shown that the rebuilding of the Mission House was necessary in any case, his fears were overruled.

His great proposition now began to be freely discussed throughout the Connexion, but for some time he took no action, hoping, as he says, that some one else would assume the onus of carrying it through. A new fillip was given to the matter at a meeting of ministers and laymen in the following November, when the spiritual needs of the metropolis were under consideration. Some one had urged that only by the creation of a new and special fund could the spiritual destitution of the rapidly growing London suburbs be relieved, and had proposed that twenty-five thousand pounds should be

raised for this purpose. This proposal also, and for the same reasons, Sir Robert regarded with disfavour, and he seized the opportunity yet further to detail the advantages of his own project. With a view to elucidating certain points, he afterwards accorded an interview to *The Methodist Recorder*, and the dissemination throughout the country of the information thus imparted made the scheme the topic of the hour.

Evidently the movement was inspired from above. Satisfied on this point, he at once set to work to prepare a definite plan of campaign to present to the following Conference. He endeavoured to secure in advance a list of ten thousand persons who, in the event of the scheme being adopted, would be willing to act as stewards. This step, taken before the Conference had had an opportunity of considering the matter, was regarded in some quarters as premature; but this was one of those occasions on which Sir Robert's faith in 'glorious irregularity' justified itself. The boldness of the whole thing had captivated the Connexional imagination, and everywhere young and old were eager to give it enthusiastic support. He foresaw that such a strong and

growing body of opinion the Conference would be unable to resist. So powerful, indeed, was the feeling, that rival interests were impotent to check it, and on January 31, 1898, he was asked further to expound his views before the London Methodist Council. At this meeting the broad issues only were discussed, and so far from attempting to rush an immature scheme, or to force the hand of the Conference, he affirmed his willingness to put his own proposals aside and give his hearty support to any better ones that might be adduced. At the same time, he stated that out of nine hundred and nine superintendent ministers to whom he had appealed, only fourteen had disapproved of his taking action before Conference had sanctioned the scheme, while seven hundred and eighteen had urged him to proceed.

When Conference met, the 'Million Fund,' as it was now called, had already engaged the attention, not merely of Methodists, but of the whole religious world; and Congregationalists, Baptists, Presbyterians, and even Anglicans, were contemplating the inauguration of similar movements. Probably no fund of any magnitude has ever been launched with fewer dis-



THE LIBRARY AT KENSINGTON PALACE GARDENS.

sentients, and up to this point, at least, not a solitary letter, so said the denominational organ, had been received raising objection to the scheme. It was on Monday afternoon, July 25, in Great Thornton Street Chapel, Hull, that Sir Robert introduced the matter, in a speech marked by great simplicity and a deep sense of the gravity of his proposals. A fact of excellent augury was that, instead of the wild cheering which sometimes marks the initiation of popular movements, the Conference gave that quiet, earnest attention to every detail which the magnitude and importance of the undertaking deserved.

The fundamental idea of the fund, which differentiated it from every other in the history of Methodism, was enshrined in the famous phrase, 'A million guineas from a million Methodists.' Asked on one occasion what suggested this principle, Sir Robert replied: 'The fact that our three other great funds—raised respectively in 1839, called the Centenary Fund, when £250,000 was raised; in 1863, called the Jubilee Fund, when £200,000 was raised; and the Thanksgiving Fund of 1878, when we raised nearly £300,000—were contributed by comparatively few persons.

Towards the last, excluding public collections, only about sixty thousand persons subscribed. My idea was to fall back upon John Wesley's own plan of small contributions from the masses, rather than large sums from the wealthy.'

This shrewd appreciation of 'the power of the penny' he derived from his fifteen years' experience in connexion with the Metropolitan Railway, which in those days carried nearly ninety millions of people every year, at an average fare of three-halfpence, and yet paid a five per cent dividend. Arithmetical calculations on any large scale are the last things in the world to occupy the mind of the average Church leader. Sir Robert simply applied an extraordinarily acute business method to religious affairs, the basis of his calculations being a computation of the aggregate wealth and savings of the Methodist people. His affirmations on this point have sometimes provoked criticism, but have never been disproved. He estimates the savings of Wesleyan Methodists during the last ten years at, roughly, one hundred million pounds. And to him it seemed reasonable, that for objects so worthy,

a modicum of this accumulating wealth should be freely surrendered at the call of the Church. Incidentally, it may be mentioned that the 'one person one guinea' principle was the one feature of the scheme which the Connexional leaders at first found difficulty in accepting ; yet it was undoubtedly the real secret of the fund's success.

There were, of course, other novel features which added greatly to the popularity of the scheme. Every person subscribing was entitled to enter his name upon a Historic Roll, to be preserved in the Church archives for the wonderment of future generations. No restrictions were imposed concerning Church membership ; any one who himself, or whose friends, living or dead, had been associated with or derived benefit from the Connexion, might give his guinea on his own or their behalf. Nor need a donor limit his gift to a single guinea ; he might give a hundred, or a thousand, if he chose ; and for every guinea given he was entitled to enter on the Roll the name of a relative or friend ; but in no case was the amount of the subscription to be recorded. A medal was also struck to commemorate the fund, one being awarded to

every child who gave or collected a shilling. By this novel means children who could not give or collect a guinea were included in the scheme and had a lasting memorial of it. On this point Sir Robert displayed a fine historic sense, for he foresaw what precious curiosities these medals will be a century hence.

The Conference over, and the seal of its approval given, the campaign began. Roughly speaking, a period of two and a half years had been assigned for the completion of the task, for it was hoped to obtain the whole amount by January 1, 1901. The public inauguration took place at Wesley's Chapel in November 1898, when the President of the Conference, the Rev. Hugh Price Hughes, who was a cordial supporter of the scheme, preached in the morning ; the Rev. C. H. Kelly, an Ex-President, presided over a conference on the aims and organization of the fund, in the afternoon ; and Sir Robert took the chair at a public meeting at night. The gatherings, which made a profound impression upon the Connexion, were described at the time as 'in the highest degree responsible and representative.' The evening meeting, in particular, was memorable. Sir Robert, said a contem-

porary writer, 'spoke like a man inspired. Many of his strokes were supremely happy. Above all, it was a godly speech, a speech that the saintliest of the old Methodist laymen, hearing about it in heaven, will thank God for.'

In the meantime, however, the promoters of the scheme had not been idle. The late Rev. Albert Clayton (the General Secretary of the fund), his eight honorary assistants, and Sir Robert, who was one of the five Treasurers, had been busily organizing meetings all over the country, preparing collecting books and boxes, and issuing pamphlets and all the other paraphernalia which such an effort required. Sir Robert himself wrote one of the first brochures, 'How can I help the Wesleyan Methodist Twentieth Century Fund?' and followed it soon after by another, 'Shall I sign the Methodist Historic Roll?' The campaign was opened in the provinces by a big meeting at Oxford Place, Leeds, which was followed by others at Manchester, Newcastle-on-Tyne, and other large cities and towns. Everywhere the utmost enthusiasm prevailed. One of the most striking features of the meetings was their deep spiritual tone. Instead of being obsessed

with the monetary side of the project, the vast audiences kept steadily in view its moral and religious ends ; a fact truly remarkable even when it is admitted that Mr. Price Hughes's famous District Conventions for the deepening of the spiritual life contributed not a little to the happy result.

As usual in such cases, the earlier part of the task was the easier. The money came in at first with great rapidity. At the inaugural meeting seventy thousand guineas had already been promised, and further gifts poured in at the rate, on an average, of £4,000 a week. But by the following Conference the stream had begun to grow sluggish. Three hundred thousand guineas had still to be raised. Now, for the first time, the voice of the doubter was heard in the land. It was urged that the time had come to depart from the original principle and for the rich men of the Connexion to save the situation. All kinds of stories were current in the Press. One rumour had it that a single family was going to give a hundred thousand pounds ; another, that three brothers had promised a like amount. Some stated that Sir Robert himself was going to subscribe the last hundred

thousand. Against such proposals the founder of the fund resolutely set his face. He pointed out that when the million guineas had been subscribed and the various new enterprises had been started, large sums would still be needed for their maintenance. Let the rank and file, he urged, contribute this initial million ; then the wealthier classes could be relied on for the support of the new schemes when they had been launched.

The difficulty of completing the fund was now increased by the outbreak of the Boer War, which not only monopolized public attention, but also, by its influence on trade and its numerous relief funds, drained the public purse. A Methodist War Relief Fund, indeed, ran contemporaneously with the Million Fund, the two subscription lists appearing side by side in the Methodist Press. Yet it is due to say that, in spite of these diversions of public support, in spite of the fact that the late Queen contributed a thousand pounds to the War funds, the Duke of Portland ten thousand pounds, an anonymous donor a similar sum, and scores of City men their hundreds of pounds, all the relief funds put together barely equalled the amount raised

by the Methodists towards their darling project in six months.

At the 1901 Conference, however, it was reported that, chiefly owing to the War, the fund was still £100,000 short of completion. Sir Robert therefore suggested that on the last Sunday in the year a simultaneous collection should be made in every Methodist chapel in the land, the ladies of Methodism to be in charge of it. The effort proved a huge success, the amount realized, in new promises and cash, being about sixty-four thousand pounds, or nearly ten times the amount of an average Connexional collection. A curious incident occurred in the course of this effort. The amount of the collection at each place was communicated to head quarters by postcard. From one village chapel came the laconic message: 'No preacher, no money.' To Methodists who know anything of the vicissitudes of rural causes, the words will need no comment. This simultaneous collection, the largest ever made in Methodism, together with one or two substantial gifts—of which Sir Robert was ignorant—from wealthy laymen, at length brought the fund to a triumphant close.

When the final report was presented at the Conference of 1908 some interesting facts were brought out. The income in Great Britain was £1,005,258; in Ireland, £52,424; abroad, £16,000; making a total of £1,073,682. Of all that was promised, only £600 was lost through death or misfortune. The interest amounted to £89,216, which, of course, was added to the fund and is included in these figures.

But it was the sagacious and economical management of the fund which gave special delight to the Conference. The expenses were considerably less than the total of the shillings gained by turning the sovereign subscription into a guinea one; and although the period covered by the fund was one of unexampled commercial depression, when Consols fell from 108 to something under 90, not one single penny of capital was lost through bad investment, while an average rate of interest of about $3\frac{1}{2}$ per cent was earned throughout the whole period. This remarkable good fortune was due in an especial manner to Sir Robert's careful financing; a fact which the general public was not slow to recognize. *The Westminster Gazette* did not overstate the case when it said, in commenting on the report: 'No

religious denomination has ever had a more capable and successful Chancellor of the Exchequer than the Wesleyan Methodists in Sir Robert Perks.'

Thus, then, was this daring venture in what he once called 'democratic Church finance,' amply justified. But it was justified not in its monetary success alone. It did more than any other enterprise had ever done to direct public attention to the magnificent work of the Methodist Church; to strengthen the loyalty of the youth of Methodism, and to stimulate the Connexional spirit, which is unquestionably one of the main causes of the denomination's progress. The sacrifice and heroism it called forth must have astonished even those who knew Methodism best. Young and old of both sexes, and people of all ranks of society, vied with each other in generosity and devotion. Ministers gave a magnificent lead, one, for example, sending fifty-three guineas for himself and family. But the real triumphs came from the very poor. The first subscriber in one provincial town was an old man over eighty, who lived in an almshouse on an income of about six shillings a week. He paid his guinea, and desired his name to be

entered on the Roll as 'A Friend.' Another case was that of a woman in the north ninety-one years of age, who spent weeks learning to write her name, so that she might herself inscribe it on the Roll. As an instance of generosity at the other end of the social scale, and from one whose connexion with Methodism is somewhat problematical, may be mentioned the case of Lord Rosebery, who contributed a hundred guineas and declared his intention not only of entering his own name, but also of picking out ninety-nine Methodist children living around his country seat and having their names put in. On this romantic side of the matter Sir Robert enlarged in one of his stirring pamphlets :

'What strange names,' he wrote, 'what divers ranks, stand side by side ! The inmate of the workhouse and the peer of the realm, statesmen and errand-boys, the millionaire and the tiny waif just rescued from the streets into the Children's Home, the city mayor and the village labourer. Here is the trembling signature of the aged saint one hundred and seven years old, "afraid she won't live many more years" ; and there on the Roll is the name of the little lassie whose feeble hand

mother guided before her little child passed to a better land. What family reunions! "We have not done anything together for years," said a rugged, tender-hearted Yorkshireman some months ago, "until my children and the missus and I signed the Roll."

But the campaign was not without its humours and curiosities, too. A north-country minister, who had learned more than usual caution in circuit matters, rose in the central meeting and promised for his circuit one hundred and fifty guineas. At that moment he had in his pocket definite promises for a hundred and forty-nine! Among the good influences of the fund upon the Connexion was that it liberalized many who hitherto had not realized their power to give. In a south-country district the superintendent applied to the trustees of a village chapel for means to purchase for their own pulpit a new hymn-book. But, oppressed by the necessities of the chapel and the scantiness of its resources, they shook their heads. Yet when the Twentieth Century Fund came round, this little village promised thirty guineas. Shortly after, the trustees met their minister, and one of them

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said : ‘ Now, friends, we will have a new hymn-book, and we will pay for it ourselves, and here is my shilling towards it.’ They had found new courage under the uplifting and liberalizing influence of the fund.

Sir Robert’s own contributions to this great movement were twofold. His monetary gifts were large. One of the officers of the fund computed them at over ten thousand pounds. To encourage the children at Bayswater he promised to put ten shillings on the card of every child in every Sunday school in the circuit, so that they might feel they had something with which to start collecting. To the supplementary fund alone, which rounded off the million guineas, he contributed a hundred additional guineas for himself and a like sum for every member of his family. And he was as earnest in begging as he was generous in giving. He tapped the purses of his business friends. One day, in the office of a well-known firm of foreign and colonial bankers, he discovered that one of the chief officials had been a Methodist, years before, in the Colonies, and on that ground he demanded five hundred guineas—and actually got one hundred. Another acquaintance,

a keeper of race-horses, was one day in Sir Robert's office. This man's mother had been a Methodist, and when he was reminded of the fact he promised 'something considerable' towards the fund. But that was not good enough for Sir Robert. 'We do not like these generalities,' he said, 'what do you mean by "something considerable"?' 'Well, at all events,' the man replied, 'I will promise you more than a hundred guineas.' A similar sum was also extracted from a lady on the ground that 'quite accidentally one of her children had been baptized long ago by a Methodist preacher.'

But Sir Robert's gifts of time and strength were of even greater value. It will not be invidious to say that from first to last his was the predominant personality in the movement. That all the officials, as well as thousands of obscurer workers, laboured heroically, is a matter of common knowledge; no one man, no score of men, could have run so great an enterprise without the ceaseless and self-sacrificing co-operation of agents in every circuit in the Connexion. For his friend and colleague, Mr. Clayton, he had ungrudging admiration. Their relations were

never anything but cordial, and Sir Robert paid many a eulogy to the tremendous labour his friend devoted to the work. But when all is said, Sir Robert's position was unique. He had his vast business interests to watch, his numerous social engagements to keep; yet for more than two years he practically placed himself at the disposal of the committee to be sent wheresoever it listed. And it was by no means easy to decide whither he should go, for it was the general demand, when a mass meeting was arranged, that he should be one of the speakers. Indeed, invitations came from as far afield as Johannesburg and New York. The Methodist Episcopal Church in the latter city invited him to address a great thanksgiving meeting, at which President Roosevelt was also to speak, in celebration of the completion of the American fund. During the whole of this strenuous period, it is alleged, he missed at most only some five or six engagements.

Sir Robert, however, would be the first to admit, that for all his labours he found full recompense in his increased knowledge of the Methodist people, in the secure place he won in their affections, and in the appreciable

improvement of his platform gifts. Concerning this last point an amusing incident is related. At the 1904 Conference, the Rev. C. H. Kelly, in moving a vote of thanks to the two chief agents of the fund, referred to the law of compensation, and declared that the recompense in Sir Robert's case was that 'He had become a very much better speaker than when he took up the work.' But in replying to the vote Sir Robert got his own back. He told how at one of the meetings there sat on his left an aged preacher, who was so moved that he interrupted his peroration by shouting 'Hallelujah!' Sir Robert asked him afterwards how he dared do such a thing. He replied, 'I have not shouted "Hallelujah" for twenty-five years.' 'So,' added Sir Robert, with a mischievous twinkle, 'if the Million Fund has improved the speaking power of the laymen, it has also rejuvenated some of the ministers.'

This subject ought not to be concluded without a further reference to one essential feature of the scheme. I allude to the new Connexional buildings at Westminster, the negotiations over which have from the first reflected his mind and financial genius in a

remarkable degree. Strange to say, the proposal to set apart a portion of the fund for this object was at first received with some misgiving. Stranger still, it may seem, the chief criticism came from London itself. Yet a little reflection will show the reason. 'If,' said a writer, while the question was still in its infancy, 'if we were to regard the matter purely in the light of the work and well-being of London Methodism, we would rather spend the quarter of a million sterling in building a number of halls, or in creating new circuits in the outlying populations. It is from a Connexional point of view that this part of the scheme shines out as just, prudent, and in the highest and noblest sense of the term, statesmanlike. We do not want an ornamental building which may occasionally be turned to great uses; we want a building large, conspicuous, in the centre of metropolitan life, every square inch of which may be in constant use all the year round for the glory of God and for the salvation of the world. We would like this house to be so used every day of the week, that all who are most earnestly spiritual in the one Methodist Church in the

United States, Canada, Australia, the islands of the south and west, Africa, India, and China, coming to London, should feel that wherever else they might go, they must go to the Central Hall.'

The first difficulty was to secure a suitable site, at a price within the sum available. Strictly speaking, this was found to be impossible; yet, thanks to the business acumen of Sir Robert and his colleagues, the end was achieved in another way. A magnificent piece of land, described as the 'first concrete appearance' of the fund, comprising 110,000 square feet, or nearly twice the area actually needed, was acquired, facing Westminster Abbey and close to the Houses of Parliament. The cost was £335,000, an amount far in advance of the prescribed sum; but, by the sale of portions of the plot that were not required, which have already realized over £200,000—with further surplus lands still for sale—the cost of the requisite area was reduced to legitimate proportions, and a position was obtained which would otherwise have been impossible. A number of valuable licences were bought with the site, but although these might have been trans-



THE NEW CENTRAL BUILDINGS, WESTMINSTER.
(*From a drawing by Messrs. Lanchester & Rickards.*)

ferred at a considerable financial advantage, they were allowed to drop, in deference to the well-known principles of the Methodist people.

Lovers of the curious will find pleasure in the fact that by the purchase of this site Methodism regained in the City of Westminster a foothold which years before she had been compelled to relinquish. On the land at the time of the purchase stood a place of public entertainment, of doubtful reputation, known as the Royal Aquarium. This, of course, has since been demolished. But at a famous meeting held there in February 1903, to commemorate the purchase, it was whispered that on that same ground, many years before, had stood a small Methodist chapel, and that at a subsequent period a Wesleyan Methodist service was held on the spot for the benefit of Army recruits.

Public interest in the new building has been widely reflected, far beyond the limits of these shores. Inquiries as to its progress have come from all quarters of the world, and from American Methodists in particular. During his recent tours in the States and Canada no question was put to Sir Robert

more frequently than this: 'When will your great building at Westminster be ready?'

The new hall, which will be one of the most monumental and imposing edifices of its kind in the world, will provide, in addition to all the usual features of a Church's head quarters, a library, representative of all that is best in modern literature and singularly rich in Methodist lore. Here will be preserved, sumptuously bound in fifty volumes, the Historic Roll, with its wonderful record of names. Future Methodists, however eagerly they may search therein for the autograph of forefather or relative, will not fail to linger a moment over the pages devoted to the Bayswater Circuit, where will be found, numbers thirty-one and thirty-two on the list, the names of Robert William Perks and Edith Perks, followed by those of the various members of their family; and, a little lower down, in the same strong hand, those of George Thomas Perks and his wife, inscribed in grateful and loving memory.

Sir Robert's latest scheme is one in every way worthy to rank with that of which I have just spoken. It is nothing less than to gather into one great brotherhood for mutual help

the federated forces of Methodism throughout the world. All through his Methodist life, he once confessed, the thought of something of the kind had been at the back of his mind. The urgent appeals for assistance in one form or another, which he, like every other wealthy Methodist, almost daily receives from distressed members of his Church, helped perhaps more than anything else to give definite shape to his plans. What he as an individual could not do, the Methodist Church collectively, he thought, could easily accomplish.

The question appealed to him in a distinctly philanthropic form. 'Is modern Methodism,' he asked, 'living up to the standard set us by John Wesley, in using the influence, the wealth, and the energy of our Church, for the social as well as the spiritual well-being of the people?' Relying on 'that all-pervasive and strange something' which creates a sense of mutual confidence between Methodist and Methodist all the world over, he suggested to the Conference of 1907 that there were four main fields in which Methodists might use their collective strength for the common good—Emigration, Employment, a Loan Society, and Provision for Old Age. State pensions

having since been established, the last-named feature has, of course, been dropped, while the question of loans is being held in abeyance.

The proposals in general were well received, both at home and abroad. Shortly after he had expounded his plans to the Methodist public in England, he had an opportunity of laying them before the Methodist Church of America. 'Without exception,' he wrote, 'they hail with enthusiasm the formation of such an international bond of Christian unity and service.'

His claims as to the ubiquity and business ability of Methodists—two facts largely relied upon for the success of the scheme—received interesting confirmation on his outward journey to the States. No sooner had he stepped aboard the steamer at Liverpool than he met a Methodist of outstanding capacity in the London manager of the 'White Star' line. A young doctor on board, whose services happily were not needed, proved to be another good Methodist. The chief official of the customs at New York turned out to belong to the same community; while on going to the offices of the shipping company to arrange his return passage, he discovered that the

head man there was again a Methodist. Even at an up-country station, the telegraph girl asked, as he handed in a wire: 'Are you Mr. Perks, the Methodist, from England?' and added, 'I, too, am a Methodist. Mother came to Canada before I was born.' And so it was everywhere. Farmers, bankers, business men, store-keepers, politicians, professional men—every class had its prominent representatives in the Methodist ranks; and, said Sir Robert, 'they were as a rule a thrifty, thinking, up-to-date, God-fearing race.'

A scheme which aims at giving a new practical significance to this vast religious freemasonry, and which makes a point of looking after the social and spiritual welfare of Methodist emigrants (of whom, by the way, there were nearly ninety aboard the vessel by which Sir Robert crossed to the States) for ever trekking towards the untried West is not likely to prove abortive; and the definite scheme of working now being devised by an influential committee is awaited by the Methodist Church throughout the world with eagerness and hope.

CHAPTER VIII

MEMBER FOR LOUTH

It is necessary now once more to retrace our steps in order to sketch Sir Robert Perks's political career. This began in 1886, at which time, he has told us, he had 'never attended a political meeting in his life.' It is difficult to believe, however, that his abstention from politics was altogether a matter of preference. Indeed, he has disclosed the real reason in a reference to the beginnings of his professional life. Early in their legal career Sir Henry Fowler had said to his partner: 'You will find that you will have to make your choice between business and politics.' The alternative was clearly put and indubitable, so with characteristic promptitude he chose for the time being business.

Ten years later, when business gave less

anxiety, the situation was somewhat changed. Nevertheless, several invitations to stand for Parliament had already been refused when the friendly pressure of Mr. Gladstone at length induced him to take up the responsible work of reorganizing the Liberal party in the East Lindsey, or Louth, Division of Lincolnshire. After the Redistribution Act of 1885, the late Mr. Francis Otter (a brother-in-law of George Eliot) won the seat in the Liberal interest from Mr. James Lowther, Secretary for Ireland. When the dissolution came in the following year, Mr. Otter again offered himself, but on the nomination day, for some reason that has never been made wholly clear, he failed to appear, leaving his party without a candidate. The Conservative nominee thus walked in without a contest and represented the division for six years. This is the only time Louth has returned a Conservative.

Exactly how Sir Robert's name came to be mentioned in connexion with the division is not known, but it at once commanded the support, both of the central organization and of the local leaders. Curiously enough, another gentleman—Mr. John Sharpe, of Bardney

Manor, the President of the local Liberal Association, who subsequently forsook the party—had already consented, before Sir Robert was nominated, to retrieve the fallen Liberal fortunes; but, putting the public interest before personal ambition, he at once gracefully withdrew and loyally supported the present member for many years.

Sir Robert's first letter to his friends at Louth was dated from Filey, August 24, 1886, and contained a declaration which, for its frankness, may be regarded as typical of his relations with the division throughout. He wrote: 'I ought perhaps to say that I am an avowed Methodist, and should not hesitate for a moment so to declare myself.' This straightforward conduct well bore out the most important part of the testimony of the Secretary to the Treasury, who commended him to the electors as one of 'rare ability, great administrative power, and high moral character.'

The Louth Division is a somewhat extensive one, stretching from Humberston in the north to Mablethorpe in the south, along the Lincolnshire coast, with South Kelsey and Stixwold marking its western boundaries. Its popula-

tion of over forty-three thousand is scattered among one hundred and seventy-five different towns, villages, and hamlets. The register totals upwards of ten thousand souls, who at election times record their votes at five-and-thirty different polling-stations.

Almost purely agricultural though the division is, Sir Robert soon proved himself a more suitable representative than some of his opponents imagined he could be. It was natural, perhaps, that they should ask : ' What can a London lawyer, whose life is spent in the courts or in handling musty parchments, know about crops, stock, and other farming interests ? ' They soon learned, however, that the London lawyer was also himself the owner of large flocks of sheep and herds of cattle, and could discuss the price of stock, wool, and other produce, with the best of them. They discovered, too, that he was an admirable judge of horses, and could place in the field as smart a team as any gentleman in the county. Indeed, at one election, such admiration was excited by his wife's pair of black ponies, that a Tory horsedealer, who declared he could tell the quality of a man by the horses he kept, decided to give him his vote. To these quali-

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the importation of live cattle and its attendant perils. More recently, by the way, he joined in opposing in the House of Commons a Bill for the removal of the prohibition against such importation.

His non-residence in the division was to small minds a grave objection to his candidature. He was occasionally heckled on the subject by Primrose dames and others, who magnified the loss which the Louth tradesmen would sustain by his living elsewhere. Such little incidents Sir Robert treated with good humour, and with an occasional flash of somewhat mordant wit. After one lady had launched against him an insufferable series of questions, he in turn asked if she would be so good as to indicate which was the house she wanted him to take, what its rent, how many rooms had it, were the drains in order, was there any land, was the roof in repair, and, finally, would she suggest where he should get his provisions. There was, to say the least, some inconsistency about the Tory attitude on this matter ; for the candidate put up against him at his first contest merely held a house in the division on a yearly tenancy, while his opponent in the second fight could boast no

more ; and, more surprising still, while Sir Robert was on the latter occasion reviled for being a Methodist, his opponent was not even a Christian, but a Jew. It showed the superiority of Sir Robert's principles that, instead of resorting to such an artifice as the hiring of a house, he stated categorically at the outset that he had no intention of residing in the division.

When he accepted the invitation to contest the seat, the hope was entertained that a general election would take place within two or three years. But it was not until six years had elapsed that Parliament dissolved. During the whole of this period, with the possibility of ultimate defeat before him, he laboured unceasingly to unite and strengthen the Liberal forces throughout the county. In the whole history of modern politics probably no candidate ever gave so freely of time, money, and strength towards a struggle the issue of which was so problematical.

An extract from one of his speeches of this period will show what were the principles which animated him in his campaign. Addressing the Louth Liberal Club in February 1887 he said :

‘ To-night, gentlemen, I want to turn your

thoughts away from the passing phases of political controversy. I shall say nothing about party losses and party gains. I am not concerned to ask whose star is in the ascendant or whose is on the wane. Statesmen come and statesmen go, but the underlying principles which ought to guide our party last for ever; and it is upon one or two of those eternal truths that I desire to say a word. New forces are to-day exerting their mighty influence upon English life and action—forces which our fathers dimly saw, but saw afar off. There was an epoch in our nation's history when wealth was the mightiest power in the land. Men and women of all ranks worshipped at the shrine of Mammon. In the realms of politics, society, and religion, gold was the key which could alone unlock the doors which led to preferment and to fame. The poor man had no chance. Seats in Parliament were bought and sold. Voters were openly bribed. Great offices in Church and State were put up to auction to the highest bidder. To-day intellect rivals wealth. Men, aye and women, too, who think and write wield a wider power and command a more attentive hearing than the men who hoard and spend. Mr. John Morley exerts a greater power to-day than the wealthiest aristocrat or the richest banker. Is not this a national gain? Who would ask for a return of the days gone by? Another momentous change has passed over our land.

Carry your minds back to the past eras in our history. You will find that there was a period in our national life when the Church and clergy were supreme ; and it was an age when England was degraded and her people ignorant and poor. That era was followed by the despotic rule of the Court and the divine right of kings was the accepted theory of government. There followed in due course the epochs in our nation's history when power passed to the great aristocratic and landed proprietors ; and then it passed to the commercial magnates. What I want to point out is, that the man of character counts for more to-day than the man of rank. Rank is indeed but the guinea stamp. And this is true not only in the realms of politics and statescraft ; it is true in the Church, in society, on the exchange, and in the workshop. Think for a moment of the quiet power exerted by that great Christian man, Mr. Samuel Morley ; and who will be found to deny the truth of John Bright's assertion that character counts for something in English public life ? There is a third, perhaps an even more potent force influencing our national life to-day, swaying public opinion and moulding the country's action. I mean sympathy. There was an era when the legislature, the Press, and commerce worshipped at the shrine of political economy, and it was a hard, severe god to worship. Legislation was a vast machine grinding out its rigid laws ;

men and women were looked upon as bits of plastic clay; everything was ordered after a process of strict inquiry and economic experiment. To-day we have the doctrine of political humanity; and the heart of the nation beats faster as we picture the feeble women and dying children and burning homes on the mountain slopes of Glencoe. How is it that Mr. Goschen, a man of orthodox economic opinions, of acutest financial skill, creates so little enthusiasm, and has no personal following? It is because his words want that touch of sympathy with human sorrow and woe which animates the speeches of Mr. Gladstone, Mr. Chamberlain, and Mr. Bright. Remember again that to-day the workers are making our laws as well as the spenders; labour as well as capital; masters as well as servants. The factory hands in the mill, the miners in the bowels of the earth, the fishermen on your seas, the labourers on the farm, are all partners on equal terms in the country's government. What mark will these new electors make upon the laws and the homes of England? Will it be good or will it be bad? There is yet another force which ought to be a mighty one, but which is, I fear, a weak one, in guiding the public thought of our land to-day. I refer to the Christian Churches. Have you ever paused to ask yourselves whether the task of creating and stimulating and directing public opinion into concrete forms is

to be left solely to political and socialistic clubs? Should not this high mission be shared by the Churches? Have the London clergy nothing to say to the masses of the people who are ready to throng the empty churches? Is the Liberal party afraid of an alliance between religion and politics? Our Puritan forefathers were not. Who can study the records of England's history without seeing that intellect, character, sympathy, labour, and Christianity have won from rulers for the people their most cherished institutions and long postponed political rights? It is because I believe that this is the undying and unconquerable creed of the Liberal party that I shall ask your aid when the day of battle comes in this important agricultural division.'

His interest in the villagers was deep-seated and of early growth. He championed them against every species of tyranny. On the eve of the election he urged the necessity for some amendment of the laws relating to local government. He took up the case of an old lady who was forced to depend for her water supply upon an almost foetid dyke; and argued that a parish council, composed of men who knew under what conditions their fellow creatures lived, would soon rectify such a scandal. The matter created no small stir

at the time, and exercised a salutary influence upon the local sanitary authorities. His good works drew admiring comment even from Tory organs, one of which described him as the strongest candidate his party could find. To these admissions his Liberal friends added yet more glowing tributes. Thus Mr. T. P. O'Connor wrote : ' He is a man of extraordinary energy, of great ability, of strong and resolute will, of intense and earnest and fervent conviction on social as well as political reforms, and he is a man of the most incorruptible integrity.'

The campaign proper opened with a carefully organized series of meetings throughout the division, and from their commencement until the poll was declared Sir Robert allowed himself hardly time to eat. In ten days he drove three hundred miles and spoke in nearly seventy villages. By the polling day it was claimed that he had put in an appearance at every town and hamlet in the division, and had also visited in person nearly every elector.

One of the secrets of his success was the pains he took to instruct in the principles for which he contended even the humbler section of the population, including those who had

no votes. Thus, on a flying visit to a certain village, he found the people had gone to a gala in a neighbouring town. The impromptu meeting was therefore attended by only about twenty persons, including women and children. Yet it is reported that he 'spoke with as much care and patience as though he were addressing two thousand.'

When the poll was declared he found himself with a majority of eight hundred and thirty-nine, out of a total poll of seven thousand, seven hundred and twenty-nine. Feeling ran high when the figures were known, and several 'incidents' of a 'regrettable' nature occurred. Sir Robert's election was the last in the county, and brought the total number of seats to seven for the Liberals, and four for the Conservatives. Those interested in the financial aspect of elections may like to know that his expenses, exclusive of the Returning Officer's charges and personal sums, amounted to one thousand, one hundred and ten pounds.

By a happy chance, Sir Robert's election was immediately followed by a domestic event which has since linked the family to the division by a close personal tie. This was the birth of his only son. The news was received with

delight by the electors, who often allude to the fact that Sir Robert's long representation of their interests is marked by the age of his heir. This first election, by the way, is the only one at which Lady Perks has not fought by her husband's side. At the last contest she attended over fifty meetings in three weeks.

The stirring years which followed the contest of 1892 reached their crisis in the summer of 1895, when once more the country was plunged in the turmoil of a general election. The rout of the Liberals which marked the beginning of the battle was reflected in the stormy scenes witnessed in the Louth Division. This was perhaps the rowdiest of Sir Robert's four campaigns, and he was subjected to numerous attacks of a personal character, which somewhat marred the amenities of the fight. His opponents strove to make capital out of his well-known attitude to gambling, by interpreting it as condemnation of sport. He experienced little difficulty, however, in rebutting the charge, inasmuch as he had subscribed to almost every sporting and recreational institution in the division, with the exception of those devoted to horse-racing and pigeon-shooting. The sporting papers



LADY PERKS.

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took the matter up with unusual animosity, as did also one of the organs of the drink interest; and the storm did not subside for several months. One of the papers subsequently declared that the forces it represented had been specially concentrated to oust Sir Robert from his seat, on the ground that he occupied 'the most formidable stronghold of the Nonconformist conscience among all the constituencies.' Hard though the battle was, Sir Robert's majority reached the respectable figure of four hundred and twelve.

If the election of 1895 was the rowdiest, that of 1900, when the country was in the throes of the South African War, was the most exciting. Of Sir Robert's attitude on the war something is said in the succeeding chapter. As to the election, he worked as hard as ever, addressing four meetings in an evening and speaking on an average for from three to three-and-a-half hours a night. One of his speeches on the war, delivered at Louth in April, was the longest he has ever delivered. Its report filled six columns solid of the local paper. It was freely quoted all over the country.

The keynotes of his address at this famous election—which, it will be remembered, was

fought on a two-year-old register, thus disfranchising through removals tens of thousands of electors—were, the South African War, Military Reform, Agriculture, Protestantism before Politics, Temperance, Education, and Old Age Pensions. Although the fight, so far as the country at large was concerned, went badly for the Liberals, Sir Robert was returned with a higher majority than he had yet achieved, namely, nine hundred and two. Upon this high figure, however, he won a further advance in 1906, when his majority rose to nine hundred and seventy-nine. This last victory won him the distinction of being the only living Liberal who has sat in four successive Parliaments for a Lincolnshire county constituency.

Like most politicians who have fought hard battles, Sir Robert has given and taken his full share of blows. The artist's pencil, the pen of the pamphleteer, and the tongue of the orator have vied with each other in caricaturing him as a long-faced Puritan and a meddlesome spoil-sport. Sometimes pencil, pen, and tongue have overstepped the bounds of decency and prudence. In 1900, for example, a local cartoonist, whose lack of skill

was exceeded only by his vulgarity, produced a singularly ridiculous picture of Sir Robert making a hasty exit from the division (which of course did not come off !), amid the jeers of a number of invertebrate and idiotic representatives of various sections of the community. So coarse was one feature of this cartoon that Sir Robert's opponent, with whose election address the offensive document had been sent out, privately, if not publicly, repudiated the production.

The story of an earlier caricature is well known. The incident took place before Sir Robert was as familiar in the district as he is to-day. A bill-sticker was posting a placard which depicted him as a limp Puritan with long black gloves and sour visage—in fact, the very antithesis of the real Perks. Sir Robert struck up a conversation with the man, who expressed a desire to fling the gentleman ridiculed on the poster into a neighbouring horsepond. 'Well,' came the quick retort, 'here he is ; I am Mr. Perks. Now put me in, or I shall put you in.' The man glanced at his challenger's sturdy figure and resolute bearing, and decided not to try. He began to apologize most profusely. 'Very well,' said

Sir Robert, 'remember in future that the English Puritans are a fighting race, and are quite prepared to fight again if necessary.'

On another occasion he was driving down a narrow lane when a loud voice behind ordered him out of the way. The speaker was a certain hectoring farmer, a member of the Sporting League, who was opposing him because he had figured upon the platform of the Anti-Gambling Association. The farmer passed and pulled up at a public-house. While he was inside his pony ran away. Out he came, and cried excitedly: 'Where is my pony?' 'It has run on before you,' said Sir Robert; 'I will give you a lift if you like, to catch him up.' But the farmer would not hear of that, so ran on until he was red and panting. Meanwhile, Sir Robert kept close at hand, and the pony far ahead. He again offered the farmer a seat. 'I am afraid lest any of 'em should see me,' he said; but looking cautiously round, and seeing none of his friends, he climbed up. Sir Robert put on speed and soon overtook the runaway. 'Don't think,' said he, as the man thanked him, '—don't think because I let you pass me once, that I can't drive.'

It will be readily believed that the candidate

for Louth would stand no nonsense, from whatsoever quarter it might proceed. At one of his meetings there was an organized disturbance. He had hardly begun his speech when loud guffaws came from the back of the hall, followed by the ringing of a bell. 'Put that bell outside at once,' he cried firmly, 'or I will send for the police.' Laughter and ringing abruptly ceased, and when he insisted upon the forfeiture of the bell, it was sheepishly given up.

Sir Robert has often spoken of the lighter experiences of a member of Parliament. Once he told of the curious petitions he had received. Recently one came from a parish near Louth, purporting to be signed by the children of the village school. The prayer of the petition was very badly expressed and was written apparently either by the clergyman or the parish teacher. The document was fastened together with pins, and in it the word 'elementary' was spelt with an 'i.' It was ultimately returned to him properly drawn up and correctly spelt.

No one familiar with Sir Robert's record will be surprised to learn that he is universally respected in the division. He began to make

friends on his first appearance in the county, and has continued to do so, while retaining all the old ones, down to the present time. His relations with his party are cordial in the extreme, his public meetings giving the impression of a great family gathering. Chatting with a railway guard at Willoughby Junction on one occasion, the writer learned that Sir Robert and his wife had recently attended some public function in the division. The good man commented on their kindness to the poor, and added: 'Yes; they've got the wealth, but they've left the pride behind.' At one of Sir Robert's meetings recently, an old man of seventy, not an elector, walked ten miles for the pleasure of seeing him.

It would be wrong, however, to conclude that Sir Robert is popular with his friends in the drawing-room sense of the term. The familiar tactics of the Parliamentary candidate have never been among his methods. Indeed, for the insinuating smile and soapy handshake he is temperamentally unfitted. One of his henchmen once suggested that he should attend a tea-meeting arranged by the local Liberal Association and shake hands with the ladies at the teapots. He contemptuously declined,

adding : ' And would you have me take a bag of goodies in my pocket for the babies ? ' All the more value is therefore to be attached to his hold on the general esteem. This is to be attributed mainly to his transparent sincerity, which from the first commanded entire confidence. He recently stated at a political meeting that throughout the whole period of seventeen years during which he had represented the division he had received but three letters from his constituency complaining of his votes.

Many Conservatives, indeed, have found themselves in the position of a certain well-known member of that party who resides at Louth. This gentleman at one election thus expressed himself : ' I am a bit puzzled what to do. In religion, I agree with Mr. Perks, but in politics I agree with our own candidate. Still, he is not quite my man, so this time I shall leave my politics out and go by my religion.' By lifting questions of religious freedom and public morality above the sphere of party politics, Sir Robert has often won the votes of those who widely differed from him on purely party matters. His clear declarations on Sunday Closing and the Local Veto, for

example—declarations, by the way, made long before he entered political life at all, and uttered with equal courage in unfriendly circles—won him practically the solid vote of the whole temperance party.

If Sir Robert has been generous in practical philanthropy towards his constituents, he in return has received many public marks of honour from them. Thus in 1903 his friends united to celebrate his silver wedding. A banquet was given in the Town Hall, and Sir Robert, who was accompanied by his family, was presented with an illuminated address, a massive silver rose-bowl, and a valuable timepiece of richly carved mahogany, standing nearly nine feet high and striking the ' Westminster ' and ' Whittington ' chimes on tubular gongs. This handsome present is to-day a conspicuous ornament at Kensington Palace Gardens. Upon both bowl and timepiece the following inscription appears :

' Presented to R. W. PERKS, Esq., M.P., and MRS. PERKS, on the occasion of their Silver Wedding, April 24, 1903, by Residents in the Louth Parliamentary Division. A token of grateful recognition of many public services and benefactions.'

More recent festivities were those held last September under the auspices of the Louth Liberal Club and the Women's Liberal Association, to celebrate the honour conferred upon him by his inclusion in the King's Birthday Honours List of newly created baronetcies. On this occasion the whole town was *en fête*, and music, popular entertainments, and stirring speeches were the order of the day.

CHAPTER IX

MEMBER FOR NONCONFORMITY

‘ As a Christian layman his influence in the cause of righteousness and liberty rivals that of any living minister. In the House of Commons there is no member better qualified than he to be the nucleus of a powerful Nonconformist party ; while on the Opposition benches there is no man who represents more widespread and powerful financial and commercial interests. Mr. Perks may therefore be appropriately considered from this three-fold point of view—not as the ideal Christian layman, Nonconformist M.P., and commercial representative—no man is that ; but as the most successful and obtainable approximation.’

So wrote the author of what is probably the best sketch of Sir Robert that has yet appeared, in the columns of *The British Monthly*, just six

years ago. The claim, so far as it relates to his character and influence as a layman, few are likely to deny. How far it is justified in regard to his position in the House of Commons the present chapter will perhaps help to show.

At a congratulatory dinner to the Methodist members of Parliament included in the King's Birthday List, in July last year, Sir Robert declared that he had never been 'a very passionate politician.' Almost in the same breath he stated that he had never been 'a very pacific Methodist,' but had 'always been in the fighting ranks of Nonconformity'; adding, that if Nonconformity was to be effective in the House of Commons it must be almost aggressively militant. Nonconformists could only gain their chief ends, he said, by cohesion, by a firm assertion of their demands, and even by the exercise of a little mild terrorism over their leaders.

In these utterances we have the secret of Sir Robert's political life. Politics, as such, touch no chord and awaken no emotion in his breast. Perhaps his shrewdness as a lawyer has something to do with this; perhaps he penetrates too readily the charlatanry of political place-seekers, and knows how slender,

in many cases, is the connexion between political harangues and personal convictions. The late Baron Brampton used to say that the House of Commons dislikes lawyers. If so, may it not be because it feels uneasy under the hard, penetrating, often cynical eye of the man of law ?

Moreover, Sir Robert's important business interests have necessarily left him little enthusiasm to expend on purely party matters. 'A man who has to be at his work in the City shortly after nine every morning,' he says, 'cannot go to the House at two and sit there till midnight. Furthermore, the methods of procedure and the habits of the House of Commons cannot be congenial to business men accustomed to act promptly, to economize time, and to push aside trivialities and delegate details.' He thinks that men shine in Parliament who would make no progress in commercial and City life, and who would never be trusted with serious financial and mercantile responsibilities. 'The House of Commons,' he once declared, 'is the place for talkers rather than for workers.' As to office, this he thinks can have few attractions for men who do not need a salary and who have looked behind

the scenes. Parliament has changed greatly during the last forty years, much of its power having passed into the hands of the great administrative departments and out of the hands of the rank and file. 'The Empire,' he says, 'is governed, not by the popular assembly, but by a bureaucracy consisting of permanent officials.'

Holding these views, as Sir Robert does, it is not remarkable that his position in Parliament is somewhat isolated. To this condition his financial independence also has doubtless largely contributed. Said Macaulay, when discussing with Lord Lansdowne the difficulties of the politician: 'Without a competence it is not very easy for a public man to be honest: it is almost impossible for him to be thought so.' Sir Robert has all along been free from this disability. 'I am not a paid member of Parliament,' he said, a short time ago; 'nor am I under any financial obligations to the Liberal Whips. I can therefore afford to be independent.'

Even among his fellow religionists in the House he has sometimes ploughed a lonely furrow; nor is this surprising in view of the notorious difficulty of compromise where

'principle' or 'conscience' is thought to be at stake. Yet has he never failed to command the respect of those with whom he has most widely disagreed. One gentleman who has had occasion to differ from him on many vital matters speaks of him as at all times 'independent, straightforward, and remarkably courageous.' Few politicians could claim, or covet, even from their friends, a higher encomium.

A story is told of his early days in the House which shows at once his pluck and his determination not to be sat upon. In the interests of his constituency he on one occasion spoke in support of a Tory measure. Sir William Harcourt, his leader, was much incensed at this independent attitude on the part of a new recruit, and in the lobby afterwards determined to administer a severe rebuke. He was standing amid a group of followers when Sir Robert approached. Frowning ominously, Sir William waited until there was silence, and then exclaimed in his pompous way: 'Young man, you have a great deal to learn in politics.' As Sir Robert was well enough advanced in life to be above the charge of excessive youth-

fulness, the snub was particularly offensive, and might easily have silenced one of less mettle.

Sir Robert, however, was not the person to take it lying down. 'Well, Sir William,' he retorted, with a smile, 'there is one thing I can teach even you.'

'Oh! and what is that?'

'How to keep your seat.'

This hit, which derived its force from the fact that the Liberal leader had just been defeated at the polls, and had only been returned through the courtesy of another candidate, elicited a titter from the bystanders and established Sir Robert's reputation as a man not to be trifled with.

The interests of his electors and the rights of Nonconformity may be said to sum up pretty completely Sir Robert's Parliamentary enthusiasms. In few other matters has he shown any 'passion.' The nearest approach thereto has been when the purely business aspect of some measure has called him to his feet. Such was the case in 1896, for example, when he opposed the vote of three million pounds for the reconstruction of the Uganda Railway, and severely criticized the method

proposed by the Government for building the line. His strictures on that occasion were as trenchant and convincing as though he had been dealing with an education difficulty or a case of religious intolerance. It has been complained—as though he were a sinner in this respect above all men that sit in Parliament!—that his voice is seldom heard in debate, and that he is sometimes absent when the House divides. It is enough to say that few members when called away are more punctilious about pairing with some other absentee, so that on matters of importance, at least, his vote may never be lost to his party.

Before speaking of some of the measures and movements to which Sir Robert, as a Protestant and a Nonconformist, has lent his support, brief reference must be made to his position during two of the greatest Parliamentary crises of recent years—the Home Rule split and the stormy period which culminated in the South African War.

At the beginning of his political career he was a firm Home Ruler and a consistent supporter of Mr. Gladstone's Irish policy. The Irish leaders, however, shortly after the

Liberal defeat in 1895, abandoned the old Gladstonian position and declared for an Irish Parliament, with an Irish executive independent of Great Britain. Hence, in 1898, availing himself of 'the delightful advantages of the private member,' who 'can say what he thinks best in the interests of his constituents and his country,' Sir Robert broke with the Irish party and abandoned Home Rule as so defined, as outside the sphere of practical politics. He saw that there had been a great revulsion of feeling in England, especially on the part of Nonconformists, against Home Rule and the Irish alliance, and he felt that to emblazon this policy on the Liberal banners in the coming struggle would be to court defeat. And defeat would mean that the Tory party, pressed by the Roman hierarchy, would, among other reactionary concessions, give Ireland out of public funds a Catholic university—a proceeding calculated greatly to alarm English Protestants.

Another cause for dissatisfaction with the Irish was their failure to support their friends on purely English questions. Time after time had they trooped in a body to vote down some cherished Liberal reform. Furthermore, their

internal dissensions, and their ostentatious and unpatriotic declarations of sympathy with the enemies of England abroad, had not tended to increase the respect of the Liberal electors. In these circumstances Sir Robert thought that the extension to Ireland of a wise system of autonomy in local affairs was as far as any Government could prudently go, and indeed all that was for the time being possible. 'I claim to be a practical politician,' he said. 'I do not want to spend the best years of my life in Parliament in beating the air, or whistling to the north wind.' Bigots might characterize such an attitude as treason or apostasy; he regarded it as common sense. 'If I find myself travelling, possibly in the dark, on the wrong road,' he said, 'am I for the sake of "consistency" to journey on, and on, and on; or am I, guided by common sense, to turn back, take the right path, and reach home?'

During the critical times prior to the Boer War, when the Liberals were divided into two camps, Sir Robert entered the Rosebery 'tabernacle.' He ventured openly to criticize Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, who, after struggling bravely, if vainly, to hold the party together, first professed his willingness to

follow Lord Rosebery's lead and then repudiated the Liberal peer for not following him. However this episode may have affected Sir Robert's political fortunes, there can be no doubt that his loyalty to his chosen chief forms not the least honourable page in his record.

In 1900 Sir Robert assisted in founding, together with Dr. Heber Hart, Mr. A. C. Forster-Boulton, M.P., Mr. J. W. Greig, and a few more, the Imperial Liberal Council. He and the present Attorney-General, Sir W. S. Robson, were two of the Vice-Presidents. At the inaugural meeting at the Westminster Palace Hotel he indicated, from the chair, the objects of the organization. These were—to provide a centre for Liberals who were desirous of advancing sound Imperial principles within the Liberal party; to assist in forming local councils for the advancement of such principles in the constituencies; to promote social intercourse and the interchange of opinions between colonists and British Liberals; and to promote the consolidation and ultimate federation of the Empire.

This Council, which possessed considerable vigour, paved the way for the Liberal League, founded in 1902, with Lord Rosebery as

President, and Mr. Asquith, Lord Wolverhampton, Sir Edward Grey, and subsequently Mr. Haldane, as Vice-Presidents. Sir Robert, who was its first Treasurer and who holds that office to-day, is credited with having taken a leading part in its formation. It was formed to bring together for common action all those who approved of Lord Rosebery's Chesterfield policy, and one of its professed objects was to show that no party has a monopoly of patriotism. While British Naval supremacy and drastic Army reform were fundamental planks in its platform, it gave first place to such vital problems as education, temperance, and the housing of the people.

As regards the South African War, Sir Robert held the view, in common with many other earnest Liberals, that the war was forced upon Great Britain, and that while more careful diplomacy might have postponed and more skilful military action and foresight might have shortened it, yet the surest way to abiding peace was the success of the British arms. Jingo 'Imperialism,' involving reckless expansion and disregard of the rights of other nations and of native tribes, he, like every other Methodist, abominates ; nor has he a

shred of sympathy with capitalists who live only for plunder, and whose yoke in South Africa would have been as intolerable as the yoke of the Boers. At the Methodist Œcumenical Conference of 1901, in one of the best speeches he ever delivered, he pleaded earnestly against 'the causes that make for war'; the chief of which, he said, were ignorance, corrupt and unlicensed journalism, and untrue and un-Christian conceptions of glory and heroism. In justice it should be said that, notwithstanding his Imperialist views, he did his utmost at the critical election of 1900 to prevent the running of Liberal Imperialist candidates in opposition to Liberals who denounced the war.

I have said that the one really passionate note of Sir Robert's political life is his championship of the rights of Nonconformity. In this cause he has toiled as few politicians have. At a meeting of the National Liberal Federation, at Newcastle-on-Tyne, as early as 1891, while yet but a candidate for Parliament, he outlined some of the reforms with which his name has been so honourably connected.

He had seen, he said, in some of the villages of Lincolnshire, little children arrive at the

school door on a wet, and sometimes winter morning, and be compelled to stand outside, taking, forsooth, the benefits of the conscience clause, while the religious instruction was going on inside, and then be permitted to enter in their damp clothing. To remedy such grievances the village school must be placed under effective popular control, free from denominational tests and atmospheres. Then there was that curious rural archaism—the clerical magistrate. This must be reformed. In the county of Lincoln sixty per cent of the people were Nonconformists, but ninety per cent of the magistrates were Churchmen. He did not altogether complain of that, although it was a very serious difficulty. But he objected to have upon the bench gentlemen who would be far better engaged in attending to their ecclesiastical duties, and who, he regretted to say, were as remarkable for the ferocity of their sentences as for their ignorance of law.

Life in an English village, he continued, would not be tolerable for Nonconformists until the burial laws and the marriage laws had been reformed, and provision had been made for the compulsory sale of sites for Noncon-

formist chapels and schools. They would like to hear the church bell tolled in the village for the Dissenter as well as for the Churchman. They would like to see the little village procession at the Dissenter's funeral passing right through the front gate of the churchyard, and they objected to their dead being relegated to the Dissenters' portion of the graveyard. They wanted the bier and apparatus connected with burials used for Dissenters as for Churchmen. Then, as to marriage, they wished it to be as cheap and easy for the Nonconformist to get married in his own village chapel as in the parish church, and they did not want to force him to lose a day's pay by going off to some neighbouring market-town to be married there under the inspection of a civil officer, showing that there was a derogatory distinction between his position and that of his neighbouring Churchman.

To these and similar reforms Sir Robert has devoted his best years. He was one of the introducers of Mr. Carvell Williams's Burials Acts Amendment Bill of 1895, which provided that while burial boards might permit portions of public cemeteries to be consecrated, such consecration was only to be regarded as

a religious rite, and was not to carry with it legal rights or disabilities or claims to fees ; and which shortened the notice of burial from forty-eight hours to twenty-four, extended the operations of the Act to non-parishioners, prohibited the clergy from attaching derogatory conditions to the burial of Nonconformists, authorized the tolling of bells and the use of biers, and prohibited glebe land from being settled upon trusts for burial purposes exclusively in accordance with the rites of the Church of England.

He also laboured, in association with other Nonconformist members, to abolish the payment of tolls to Anglican clergymen in connexion with Nonconformist burials in public cemeteries ; and to withdraw from the clergy the practical control of inscriptions, the selection of places of burial, and the forms of service to be used in the consecrated parts of such cemeteries.

As to the disabilities under which Nonconformists laboured so long in the matter of marriage, Sir Robert, for many years prior to the introduction of the Bill with which his name will ever be associated, showed his deep interest in the question by opposing

sundry unsuitable measures introduced from time to time, and by supporting others more or less satisfactory. This was in harmony with the standing instructions given by the Methodist Conference to its Committee of Privileges.

He at length addressed himself to the matter with special care, and in 1897, in conjunction with a committee representing the various Free Churches, drew up his famous Nonconformist Marriages Bill ; a measure which had the support, not only of the said Churches, but also of the Dissenting Deputies, the Liberation Society, and other kindred bodies. As is well known, the Bill provided for the solemnization of marriages in all registered places of worship, without the presence of the civil registrar. Some would have preferred a levelling-down measure which would have made the attendance of the registrar compulsory at all churches alike ; but such a proposal would have deferred reform indefinitely. An easy course would have been to introduce a Bill removing the disabilities from Methodists alone ; but in their desire to assist all Nonconformist Churches alike, Sir Robert and his friends conceded

many points so that the measure might be made of wider application. The Bill was opposed by some Nonconformist ministers on the ground that it would increase both their work and their responsibility ; but happily their selfish objections were overruled by its provisions being made permissive and not compulsory. Notwithstanding complaints that the measure was unduly intricate, it has, generally speaking, worked smoothly. Among other benefits, it has made Nonconformist marriages appreciably cheaper—an important consideration to the working-classes. The extent to which it satisfied Wesleyan Methodist feeling will appear from the fact that of the eleven thousand registered buildings which adopted the provisions of the Act within the first twelve months, practically one-half were Wesleyan chapels.

In 1906, at the request of the Committee of Privileges, Sir Robert once more introduced the Places of Worship Sites Bill, a measure conferring upon the Free Churches power to obtain sites for places of worship in cases where landowners are not willing to sell. This privilege the Church of England has long possessed. The Bill passed the Commons

as early as 1893, but was destroyed by the intolerable conditions imposed by the Lords. Recent attempts to carry it have unfortunately proved no more successful, but it is still engaging its promoters' attention. Other notable questions upon which he addressed the House were the Places of Worship Enfranchisement Bill of 1893, and the unjust Tithe Rent Charge Bill of 1899.

Not only Nonconformists in general, but also individual sufferers from clerical tyranny, have found in Sir Robert a staunch friend. Cases of intolerance brought under his notice have more than once been ventilated in the House of Commons. One such occurred in 1899. A Methodist evangelist was summoned before the local magistrates for preaching in a certain village on a spot where services had been conducted for many generations. The summons was granted, at the instance of one of his parishioners, by the resident clergyman, who himself sat on the bench to try the case, and, when the evangelist asked for an adjournment to secure legal assistance, described him, before the evidence had been heard, as a street brawler. Sir Robert called the Home Secretary's attention

to the matter and asked whether he would advise the reverend magistrate not to adjudicate upon a case in which he was interested and which he had so prejudged.

Another incident to which he called attention was the prohibition by a certain bishop of the placing of artificial wreaths on the graves of departed friends—a right which, as Sir Robert justly pointed out, has been exercised, beyond the memory of man, without consulting the clergy. Although the case in question proved to have arisen through a misunderstanding, Sir Robert's action in the matter was none the less chivalrous.

Throughout the long education struggle Sir Robert has played a yeoman's part, not, indeed, always in perfect agreement with his fellow Nonconformists, nor even with his less progressive fellow Methodists, yet ever loyal to the fundamentals of the Free Church position—a complete national system of education with popular control, the abolition of religious tests for teachers, and simple Bible teaching in the schools. These legitimate demands he has striven to enforce in the House of Commons, on committees, on deputations, on the platform, in the Press,

wherever, in short, his influence could be effectually exerted.

Towards the end of 1901 an important deputation of the National Council of the Free Churches waited upon the Liberal leader at Lord Spencer's house in London to submit their views upon Mr. Balfour's Education Bill. Sir Robert Perks was one of the spokesmen. Lord Rosebery, who had retired the previous year from the leadership of his party, in replying to the deputation used these striking words: 'If the country is prepared to submit to the principle enunciated in this Bill you may give yourselves up to an interminable reign of the principles associated with Lords Eldon and Sidmouth; you may hope for an era of great military, naval, and diplomatic supremacy abroad, but you have very little to hope for in the development of free institutions at home. I confess that were the Nonconformists of England tamely to submit to the enactments of this Bill, I will not say that they would be weakened religiously, but I will say this—that, in my opinion, politically they would cease to exist.'

Referring to this important declaration a

few weeks subsequently, in a speech in Lincolnshire, Sir Robert said :

‘ Is it surprising that politicians who stand outside the charmed circles of Nonconformity wonder how the militant forces of religious freedom intend to act ? Are we going without a struggle to see the educational fabric patiently reared during the last thirty years levelled to the ground ? Who is it that complains of the great School Boards ? Certainly it is not the parents of the children. Whatever town in our land you enter, wherever there is a choice between a public school and a sectarian school, the parents choose the former. Church schools are dying. School Board schools flourish. Will any rational and fair-minded man deny that the Nonconformists have a very real grievance ? We number more than half the nation. In multitudes of schools our children are in a vast majority. And yet what do we find ? The teaching profession in twelve thousand denominational schools is closed to Nonconformists. No matter how accomplished they may be, they can be neither head nor assistant teachers. Not only so, but our children are either compelled to learn creeds and catechisms repugnant to their faith and often at variance with the Protestant religion, or they are compelled to stand shivering outside the school doors till the religious teaching is

over : and woe betide parents in rural districts who claim the benefits of the conscience clause. Surely the old Liberal doctrine that the man who pays must rule should extend to every elementary school in the land.'

When the 1902 Bill drove thousands of God-fearing people to refuse payment of what they regarded as an iniquitous rate, Sir Robert expressed his approval of their action. 'I am now, and have always been,' he subsequently wrote, 'in favour of the Passive Resistance movement. I entirely approve the course which Dr. Clifford, Dr. Robertson Nicoll, Mr. Meyer, and other trusted leaders of the Free Churches have taken ; and I believe that the Christian men and women who have suffered the despoiling of their goods rather than pay a sectarian rate, have rendered, and are daily rendering, an untold service to the cause of British liberty and the Protestant faith.' On this point he differed from a large body of his fellow Wesleyans. Although the Conference abstained from expressing either approval or disapproval of the movement, he moved and carried a resolution of sympathy with those who had suffered for conscience' sake.

Like other leading Nonconformists, he was bitterly disappointed with Mr. Birrell's Bill in 1906, and when it was discharged, owing to the mutilation it received at the hands of the Lords, he shared the general feeling of relief. Mr. McKenna's Bill, a year later, he regarded with no more favour, believing that it would have strengthened enormously the Anglican and clerical party, especially in rural districts and single school areas.

Mr. Runciman's Bill, last year, was a task of admitted difficulty, following as it did two abortive efforts. Moreover, the popularity of the Government was already waning, and there was a growing determination in the country to clear the education controversy out of the way. Therefore, although the Bill was one over which, he said, Nonconformists could hardly be expected to go into raptures, he set the gains against the losses and fell in with the compromise. It must, however, be said that he was one of the last to yield over the contentious 'contracting out' clause, believing that such a concession was thoroughly odious to the majority of Free Churchmen. Nonconformity, he thinks, lost her golden opportunity three years ago,

when, flushed with victory, the Liberal party went to Westminster with a clear mandate from the electors. Her leaders failed to act with unity and decision; they refused to make their voices heard; they allowed an unsympathetic Cabinet committee to bring in a Bill which Mr. Birrell himself admitted the nation did not want. And, since the Government's latest attempt to solve the difficulty has also proved abortive, they are still paying the penalty.

In order to hasten the emancipation of the Free Churches, Sir Robert, aided by his friends, founded in 1898 the Nonconformist Parliamentary Council. The inaugural meeting was held at St. Martin's Town Hall, on May 3, and was both representative and influential. In the following month the constitution of the Council was drawn up, and at a great conference of Nonconformists, held in November, was formally adopted, Sir Robert being elected President, Mr. Lloyd George Vice-President, and the Rev. J. Hirst Hollowell Secretary. This organization, formed to consider questions really outside the purview of what may be called evangelistic Christian work, has proved of immense service in many ways. Being—

unlike the Church Parliamentary Committee—of a representative character, it has enabled the party leaders to gauge Nonconformist feeling on any matter before the House.

The utility of such a committee was illustrated in connexion with the Nonconformist Marriages Bill, previously referred to. 'I should never have got that Bill through,' said Sir Robert on one occasion, 'if it had not been for a sort of united action of the governing bodies of the Free Churches on the second reading, and, more than that, an organized system whereby the local members, particularly Tory members, representing towns in which Nonconformity was very strong, were appealed to through the local Nonconformist agents to support the Bill. The result was that, if the Government had resisted the second reading, they would have been helplessly beaten, because there were scores of Conservative members in the House pledged to their Nonconformist friends and constituents to vote for it.'

In the more distinctly evangelistic side of Free Church life Sir Robert has shown his interest by the part he took in the establishment of the National Free Church Council,

of which from the first he has been one of the Treasurers. Both at its annual congresses and on its various committees he has taken an influential part. With its federation movement, its stand on social purity and temperance, its promulgation of Protestant principles, he has been in deep sympathy; and there was a time, before he felt the necessity of dropping some of his public engagements, when a gathering under the Council's auspices was thought to be hardly complete unless at one of the sessions he occupied the chair.

He has given whole-hearted support to measures of licensing reform, as well as to various agencies for the encouragement of temperance. To his life-long efforts on behalf of the Sunday closing of public-houses and the promotion of Sunday observance generally, must be added, in concluding this account of Sir Robert's many public services, his pleas for Church disestablishment and his intense hostility—amounting at times almost to zealotry—to sacerdotal pretensions and Romish practices in the Established Church.

The question may perhaps be asked: Were the ideals which he set before his future

constituents in 1887 abandoned after he had seen more of Parliamentary life? The answer is found in a speech he gave at Binbrook, up on the Lincolnshire Wolds, in September 1901. Concluding a long deliverance of an hour and twenty minutes' duration, he said :

' We sometimes ask in our despondent moments : Is England a dying nation ? I think not, because I know what national faith and national determination mean to a race and to a people. You ask a man : Upon what does the prestige and the power of a nation rest ? He will tell you that money is the backbone of a nation ; that wealth is its vital force, and that national credit will carry us through every trouble and help us to surmount every social danger. I do not think that can be the view of those of you who have studied the history of this nation, still less of you who have grasped the principles of the Christian faith. You meet another man and again you say : What is prestige ? upon what does the power and strength, the vitality and progress, of a people depend ? He says to you : It depends upon physical force. Force is the ultimate tribunal. What a nation is physically that will it become eventually. Keep your powder dry. See that your army is well organized, well equipped, and

well controlled ; build massive ironclads and keep abreast with other nations in the invention of engines of destruction and wholesale murder ; train your athletes in the football match and the cricket field ; keep your race strong, and your country will grow in power, because its prestige rests not on money, not on the dross of temporary wealth, but upon physical force. That is how not a few men speak. Go to another and he says : Perish gold and force and physical strength—these are not the life of a nation. The secret of our strength is humanity, justice, and righteousness. Administer justice, be equitable, place upon the benches of your courts of law and on your magistracy men of probity and mercy. Humanity and sympathy are the foundation of a nation's prestige ; universal love and the federation of mankind. Love your neighbour, even though he be your rival, as yourself ; try to assuage everywhere the woes of humanity ; pour the oil of love into the wounded sores of oppressed people. My friends, I am not here to-night to deny that some of the powerful motives I have named are at the basis of national progress and power. Wealth, physical force, justice, and humanity are, thank God ! instruments which may be used for a nation's welfare ; but I say to you as that revolutionary and mighty soldier of his country and of God, Oliver Cromwell, said two hundred and fifty years ago—if you want to fight suc-

cessfully the battles of your country abroad on the field of battle, or if you wish to fight them in the legislature at home, and to conquer, you must not have men who worship wealth, or physical force ; you must have men who fear God and love man—men who have not to seek the sanction for their actions in some mythical deity in some far-off and unknown realm, but who live day by day in the conscious knowledge of the favour of God ; men who base all their efforts, feeble and failing though they may be, upon a profound conviction that they are striving to regulate their lives by the Word of God ; men who hope for favour, not from the passing passions, the floating fancies, and the fickle friendships of life, but men who base their actions upon the invincible belief that when they have done their best and fought their hardest in this struggle of life they will hear those words, “ Well done, thou good and faithful servant.” ’

CHAPTER X

CHARACTERISTICS

A WELL-KNOWN writer, of ultra-Radical if not socialistic proclivities, hearing that a Life of Sir Robert was shortly to appear, indulged a little unwonted malevolence at that gentleman's expense. Discussion elicited the fact that Sir Robert was held guilty of two enormities: he had denounced the preaching in the pulpit of party politics, and, still worse, had 'made money'!

As the discussion of politics of any sort in religious services is a practice as to the rightfulness or wrongfulness of which even the Christian Church itself is sharply divided, the matter may be dismissed with the single remark that in general no sins are more fearful in theory and more trivial in fact than those attributed to each other by uncharitable Christians.

On the second point there is more to be said. In an age when it is becoming more and more an offence for the individual to hold property

at all, it is perhaps natural for certain classes to suspect the morality of money-making. Cynics and malcontents, in particular, may be expected to ask, Can a man grow rich honestly? And as a negative answer is more flattering to the inquirer than an affirmative, it is not surprising, human nature being what it is, that it is the answer commonly given. More observant philosophers, however, are unable to rest in such hasty generalizations, and find that there is a retributive principle at work in the world, whereby on the whole men get pretty much what they deserve. Applied to industrial and commercial life, this rule shows that there is a closer relation between character and industry on the one hand, and prosperity on the other, than the practice of many might lead one to suppose. Nor will the popular plaint about difference of opportunities bear investigation. Such differences certainly exist; but it is notorious that the majority of the world's great businesses have been founded by men who owed nothing to opportunity, and who had, indeed, in early life to fight against poverty and misfortune; while who cannot point to great houses that have crumbled and fallen, notwithstanding

all their prestige and resources, through the irresolution and weakness of those who have succeeded to their management ?

In accounting for Sir Robert Perks's success, however, it must be remembered that he started with some valuable assets—robust health, a well-spent youth, honourable family traditions and a dauntless spirit. We have also seen that as a young man he was of punctual and regular habits, and that he was at work while most young fellows are still abed. It may be interesting to know to what he himself attributes a good deal of his success. 'I have been asked,' he once said, 'how I have contrived to get through such an enormous amount of business. My reply is : by having no arrears ; by making up my mind quickly, even though I occasionally make mistakes ; and by delegating as much of the detail as possible, while at the same time keeping master of it myself. My counsel to the young fellow of to-day is, first, be extremely abstemious ; second, work very hard ; third, save all you can, and fourth, pay little attention to criticism. If he asks many people's opinions and worries himself about what people say, he will have no peace at all.'

His own average day is still a busy one. Half-past seven is now his usual hour of rising. Before his duties at the House of Commons detained him abroad till nearly midnight, it was his practice to be in his office at nine o'clock every morning. Even when he resided at Chislehurst he did not depart from this habit for fifteen years. His mornings are divided between his office at Westminster and the City. The rest of the day he devotes to political duties, filling up the intervals with interviews and his books and papers.

In this programme, it will be noticed, there is little place for recreation. This he finds chiefly in change of occupation. A thorough sympathizer with healthy sport and pastimes, he nevertheless holds that excessive devotion thereto is in many cases responsible for lack of business success. The same amount of energy expended in more serious pursuits would, he thinks, yield commensurate returns of a substantial kind. Of course, if the young footballer is satisfied, there is no more to be said ; every one to his taste. Only, 'Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.'

Though opportunities alone do not explain success, where there is character they facilitate

and promote it. Some of the openings of which Sir Robert made such excellent use do not to-day exist, or are much restricted. Railway extension in this country, if it has not reached its limits, is fast approaching them. Competition in the professional world is much keener than it was. And there are not so many safe and profitable investments open to the man of modest means. Another point not to be overlooked is that some vocations cannot, with all the energy and industry in the world, yield more than a limited return. The great professions, if they impose heavy initial costs and have heavy risks, offer to the man of talent many opportunities of amassing wealth. But who can say as much of journalism, or bricklaying, or painting, or driving a 'bus? Yet, happily, money is not everything, and every calling has its compensations.

Then, even within the limits of a particular vocation there is scope for discrimination. Some veins are already overcrowded and exhausted, others are practically untapped; and there will always be those who lack the initiative to strike out in the latter. The same weakness obtains in the religious world. Who does not know those who lavish on the resus-

citation of effete institutions the care and labour which others give to the launching of a world-crusade or the introduction of the 'gospel to a continent? Needless to say, Sir Robert Perks approximates to the latter type. Nearly every affair in Church life in which he took active interest involved large issues or had an almost world-wide *Wirkungskreis*. It was the same in business; from the first his mind turned naturally to the larger and more remunerative branches of his profession. As some one once put it, he 'thinks in millions' and 'takes large views.'

This trait was exhibited many years ago in a little matter that will be of peculiar interest to his Methodist friends. Prompted by his father's love of ecclesiastical research, he conceived the idea of mastering all the intricacies of Methodist law and usage from Wesley's day to his own. As a preliminary step he began to accumulate a great Methodist library, advertising widely for 'books, manuscripts, documents, or Connexional reports,' bearing upon the constitution or administration of the Methodist societies. But when he came to investigate, his intensely practical mind drove him to the conclusion that the whole project was a weariness and a waste of

time. The chief matters with which the Methodist fathers were concerned, he says, and over which they sometimes quarrelled, like the schoolmen of old, were comparative trifles, having little or no relation to the practical issues of life. To occupy himself with such things seemed therefore too much like using the muck-rake, ecclesiastical minutiae and doctrinal hair-splitting being the filth and garbage, and the application of the gospel to modern needs, the crown of life.

It is almost superfluous to add that Sir Robert is an avowed individualist. 'I am an individualist all round the compass, so to speak,' he once said. 'In commerce, in politics, in the Church—in all these spheres of public life, I have, by training or experience, or what-not, been a very strong individualist, rather opposed to centralization.' One reason for this opposition is, that centralized authority, on account of its impersonal character, is not readily amenable to moral sanctions, and once established, may survive through many generations, whereas the worst individual tyrant in the world must sooner or later cease to be. He added that his long experience of commercial concerns had taught him that, as a rule,

on boards of directors and similar bodies there was a lower standard of morality than was the case with the individual employer.

As some well-known Methodists have declared themselves Socialists, while Sir Robert, as we have seen, belongs to the opposite sociological camp, I may here quote his views on this vexed question. From these it appears that, individualist though he is, he and his brethren are agreed on two essential points: the need for comprehensive social reform, and the duty of the strong to help the weak. Writing two years ago in *The Methodist World*—a monthly journal with which he was financially associated—on the subject of ‘Methodism and Socialism,’ he said:

‘It should not be forgotten that although John Wesley was an ardent and very original social reformer he was no Socialist. He had read too much history, and was far too practical to accept the wild theories of communistic sociology. Change the life, he urged, and you will change the home. Reform the home, and you will alter the city. Cleanse the city, and you will establish and strengthen the State. All this Wesley declared was primarily the duty of the individual citizen. He combated with all his force the Utopian doctrine of the

Anabaptists, that property should be held in common. In pointing out the strongly individualistic teaching of the founder of Methodism, and declaring our belief that many of the theories of modern social reformers, who claim to be Christian teachers, have no basis in Scripture, and can have no place in a well-ordered and progressive State, we must not be assumed to urge that societies, whether religious or municipal, or even industrial, should not be required to utilize their federated strength for the uplifting of the weaker members of the body. It is on this sound platform that the Methodist Church has so successfully and patiently worked. An old country like England has social burdens to bear, and duties to perform, of which younger and more scantily peopled States know nothing. Parliament may have to devise some method for compelling the richer members of the State, not merely among what are called the upper, but also among the prosperous middle and artisan classes, to take their fair share in succouring and providing for the vast army of helpless yet deserving poor, who are living on the verge of destitution. What form this compulsory philanthropy should take we are not prepared at the moment to say. That something on a colossal scale will have to be attempted we are quite sure, and to this task Church and State, working in close and voluntary alliance, should speedily address themselves.'

But, to revert to the morality of money-making, it is after all the use of wealth, rather than its accumulation, that is the test of character ; for therein the motives of its acquisition stand self-revealed. Reference has already been made to Sir Robert's generosity, and it is unnecessary to say more, except this, that his gifts have generally been of that thoughtful character which stimulates self-help, that they have been bestowed almost as freely outside his own Church and his own Parliamentary division as within them, and that, disbelieving in the endowment of charity, he prefers to give all he can during his lifetime rather than to bequeath it at his death. A friend of the family, who has intimate knowledge of Sir Robert's affairs, assures me that the latter's gifts to charity and politics during the last five-and-thirty years cannot have amounted to less than a hundred and fifty thousand pounds.

Monetary gifts, however, are by no means the supreme form of generosity. Hospitality ranks higher, and in it Sir Robert and Lady Perks have conspicuously shone. Their beautiful home at Kensington Gardens has been freely opened to thousands of people whose sole claim upon them has been their

religious and philanthropic associations. Again and again, when a Methodist Conference or a congress of social or religious workers has been held in London, have these generous friends welcomed its members to their residence and bountifully entertained them. At the first Œcumenical Methodist Conference in 1881, for example, they extended their hospitality to the whole sixteen hundred delegates, both white and coloured. There are times when such exposure of the domestic sanctuary, such unveiling of private tastes and family possessions to crowds of strangers, must make heavy demands upon the magnanimity of those who, like Sir Robert and his wife, go little into society and cling tenaciously to domestic joys.

This leads me to speak of one side of Sir Robert's character that is little understood. It is said of Bulwer Lytton, the novelist, that the airs of indifference and frivolity he sometimes assumed were partly the devices of a shy nature to protect itself from unsympathetic notice. Somewhat similarly, Sir Robert's apparent harshness in debate and his occasionally curt manner with strangers, are partly—I will not say wholly—the devices of a sensitive nature to shield itself against attack. Where

a high sensibility exists side by side with conscious power of retaliation, a wound, and sometimes the mere fear of one, will often provoke a retort which, taken alone, would give a totally false impression of him who makes it. That in Sir Robert's nature there is a real combination of tenderness with strength, I trust this volume has already shown ; but the supreme evidence is furnished by his home-life, which has always been singularly sweet and happy. Instead of indulging himself in those selfish gaieties which wealth and position can so readily command, he has devoted himself without reserve to all kinds of philanthropic movements and disinterested advocacies, and at the close of each arduous day has been content to seek, not the playhouse or the clubroom, but the old-fashioned, often despised, but none the less genuine and abiding, pleasures of the domestic hearth.

In all his activities Sir Robert has found a keen sympathizer in Lady Perks, who supplements his labours with many personal ministries of her own. Throughout the Louth Division she is respected by all and beloved by not a few. Though prevented from being by her husband's side in his first contest, she has

not failed him since, and as first President of the Louth Women's Liberal Association, and by identifying herself with every local movement for the betterment of the people, she has not only strengthened his hands, but has materially advanced the Liberal cause in the division. Another branch of public service that has won her ladyship's warm support is work among women and children, and for some years she has made herself personally responsible for a rescue home for the unfortunate members of her sex.

But it is in her duties as a housewife that Lady Perks takes chief pleasure, having little sympathy with those women who make 'home' but a lodging, while they dissipate their energies in other people's business. She takes great pride in her charming homes, which are crowded with books, paintings, engravings, and all sorts of delightful curiosities indicative of cultured tastes. As a hostess her ladyship is gracious and tactful, and whether she be entertaining prominent statesmen or humble Methodists from the country, her kindly, almost diffident bearing wins all hearts.

Sir Robert's union has been blessed with five children, who have taken an active part in

various philanthropic enterprises. His eldest daughter was for six years Treasurer of the Young Leaguers' Union of the National Children's Home and Orphanage. His third daughter, Edith Mary, was married last December to Fleet-Paymaster Bertram C. Allen, R.N., of the Royal Naval College, Dartmouth, at the Bayswater Wesleyan Chapel, the officiating ministers being Dr. D. J. Waller, Ex-President of the Conference and Chairman of the Second London District, and the Rev. George Hammond, the Superintendent of the Bayswater Circuit. After the ceremony, which was the most brilliant in the history of this famous chapel, Sir Robert and Lady Perks held a largely attended reception at Kensington Palace Gardens. Sir Robert's only son, Mr. Robert Malcolm Mewburn Perks, after completing his studies at the Leys School, Cambridge, is being trained as an engineer and will succeed to his father's business.

In addition to his town residence Sir Robert has a country house at Wykham Park, Banbury, and a seaside home at Littlestone, Kent. The Wykham Park estate was bequeathed by the late Mr. William Mewburn to his only son, who, on the death of his mother in 1902,



WYKHAM PARK, BANBURY, SIR ROBERT'S COUNTRY HOUSE.

sold it to Sir Robert. Since acquiring the property, the latter has made extensive alterations, building a new wing to the house and a picture gallery and library. The stables of the estate are constructed out of what was once a row of ancient houses, in the upper rooms of which some of Oliver Cromwell's soldiers were quartered after the battle of Edgehill.

The handsome residence at Littlestone was built through Sir Robert's connexion with the Lydd Railway. In the ample grounds stands a small hall, formerly used for divine service. Although their seaside home is always ready for occupation at a moment's notice, Sir Robert and his family rarely spend more than a couple of weeks there in the course of the year. Its title, 'Claverley'—which was also given to their Chislehurst residence—is derived from one of Sir Robert's ancestors, whose memory his father cherished with peculiar affection. She was a stiff Jacobite, who whenever prayers were read for the House of Brunswick refused even to kneel. Her father was an officer in the Young Pretender's army and fought for him at the battle of Culloden.

Sir Robert's diversions are found chiefly among his books and papers. His library

comprises altogether some fourteen thousand volumes, of which nine thousand are accommodated in an exceptionally handsome chamber at his Kensington mansion. This section includes books on politics and general literature, historical and biographical works, and the standard books of reference. At Wykham Park are his volumes on art and archæology, county histories, and sufficient works of reference to meet occasional need.

Sir Robert has little appetite for light literature. He reads, or attempts to read, perhaps two novels a year, and even then, he says, generally sticks fast in the middle. This is not comforting to the novelist, who doubtless hopes that power to purchase and capacity to consume may always go together. Sir Robert confesses, however, that a year ago he read one novel through from cover to cover at a single sitting. The writer who achieved this conquest was Mr. A. E. W. Mason, M.P., with *The Broken Road*. Readers who are familiar with the work will not be surprised that Sir Robert's practical mind should be fascinated by its brilliant pages. His love of serious reading was well illustrated once when he was showing a friend a school prize, the

Works of Bishop Hooker, in two volumes. 'Of course you have not read it?' said the visitor, handing it back. Promptly came the rebuke—'Every line, sir, from the first page to the last'!

The same serious vein shows itself in his holidays, many of which are closely interwoven with business projects. Even at Braemar and in Switzerland, two of his favourite resorts, he is generally occupied with paper and pen, and he emerges from his retreat with some political pamphlet, or, more frequently, with some vigorous contribution to the Press on the affairs of his Church or the cause of religious liberty. Nor do his religious interests forsake him, as is the case with some, when the object of his travels is purely business.

Some years ago, on his way to St. Petersburg, where his firm were busy in the survey of a railway from Viatka to Vologda, he spent a Sunday in one of the capitals *en route*. There being no Methodist chapel in the city, he went with his wife and children to the Anglican Church. The congregation was a motley one—English tourists, American globe-trotters, and in the front pews the members of the local British colony. Presently a venerable

clergyman, in a white surplice with a crimson hood, mounted the pulpit, and taking from the folds of his gown a well-worn manuscript, commenced his sermon.

'We had been spending a good deal of the morning in describing ourselves as miserable sinners,' said Sir Robert, telling the story afterwards. 'The preacher boldly called us criminals. He described in harrowing language our pitiable state, which he ascribed to heredity. Our parents might have been thieves or drunkards, or, if our fathers and mothers were not, then our remote ancestors were. Then came a few philosophical words about evolution. "Some of you," said the preacher, "cannot read or write." We looked at one another and then at the reverend gentleman in the pulpit. Something evidently was wrong. He was nervously fingering his manuscript. His sermon was clearly being delivered to the wrong congregation, for, hastily pulling himself together, he said: "Of course, that does not apply to my present hearers." A sigh of relief passed through the building. The preacher turned nervously over the well-thumbed leaves, selected cautiously a few more

passages, and brought his discourse to a rapid end. The good man was, it appeared, a prison chaplain, and had brought with him on his Continental travels the wrong sermon. As I was going out I heard the wife of the resident clergyman explaining to some friends that the preacher was a stranger. "But," said the vivacious little lady, "it is *such* a relief not to hear one's own husband." What he might have been we shuddered to think as we thanked God for ministers who could preach without manuscripts.'

When absent in Canada and the States, too, on the great business enterprise already referred to in these pages; Sir Robert's energies overflowed into non-commercial and non-industrial channels. He visited numerous churches and addressed several important meetings. In New York he spoke to a large gathering of ministers, at which many eminent personages were present; and at Ottawa he delivered a striking speech on 'British Methodism of To-day: Its Work and Ideals.' Wherever he went he kept open eyes. He did not shrink from criticizing the services he attended and the sermons he heard, and in a series of graphic and invigorating letters home

—which letters it puzzled his friends how he found time to write—he told what he had seen and heard.

Clearly, then, the great religious and humanitarian causes with which he has been identified have not been espoused from ulterior motives, but are, so to speak, part of the man himself. His activities therein have been but so many modes of self-expression, and, to trace things back to their source, so many fruits of a wise parent's love and care. Thus, whatever Sir Robert Perks may have missed of the lighter, more volatile joys of life, he has had his cup filled to the brim with those serener and more lasting pleasures which spring from earnest purposes steadfastly maintained and not infrequently fulfilled. And while a life thus spent in honourable endeavour has brought its indubitable rewards, it may I think be claimed, in concluding my pleasant task, that he has not failed in service to his fellows, and that his career is not without suggestiveness, alike for its independence and its consistency, to those whose record is yet in the making.

